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THE PERSON OF CHRIST  
IN THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH



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THE PERSON OF CHRIST  
IN THE FAITH OF THE  
CHURCH & The Fifteenth Series of  
the Croall Lectures By A. WALLACE  
WILLIAMSON, D.D., C.V.O., Dean of the Order  
of the Thistle and the Chapel Royal of Scotland;  
Minister of St Giles' and Chaplain in Ordinary to  
the King in Scotland.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD  
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## THE RETURN TO CHRIST.



# I.

## THE RETURN TO CHRIST.

THE most characteristic feature of Christian thought during the last eighty or ninety years is the growing emphasis on Christ as a historical personality. Jesus is again "in the midst." This is a fact of vast significance and cannot fail to bring with it, as indeed it has already brought, most weighty consequences. To what extent it may modify the theology of the Church it would be rash to predict, but one result is certain. Renewed and intense interest in the human life of Jesus cannot fail to give in the end a deeper reality to faith. It is always a danger and a loss to Christian experience when the gulf between the

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Christ of dogma and the Christ of history remains broad and palpable.

## I.

A recent historian recalls the impression made upon the youthful reformer by the frowning face of Jesus represented in judgment in the window of his Parish Church. Similar repulsion may often be caused by the apparent contrast between the form in which Christ is presented in the dogmatic dress of the Creeds, and that in which we meet Him within the pages of the Gospels. Even when no necessary contradiction is implied the mind may experience a shock as of an intellectual incompatibility. We look on this picture and on that. We see the great mystic outlines of a Being Whom we are taught to regard as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, at once God and Man, Supernatural, Divine, Human, existing for ever in two distinct

Natures, and with two concurrent yet distinct Wills. This is the Christ of the faith. Then we see Jesus set in the stream of human history, born of an Earthly Mother, living our life under conditions which exhibit in attractive simplicity a human character of unique harmony and beauty. On the one side we have a description of qualities converging in a personality Who transcends our power of comprehension ; on the other we have a portrait presenting in concrete form the outlines or at least certain elements of the life and character of Jesus which enable us to realise to some extent His place in history. Jesus we know by historical evidence, Christ also by faith. In other words the Christ of the Creeds is the Christ as seen by faith basing itself on the facts of His earthly life. It is Christ presented to us by the faith of the Church whose accumulated impression of His Personality was the result of a process which had already begun when Peter made his great confession, when the Centurion

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at the cross said, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Sometimes the distinction is ignored, sometimes unduly emphasised. In either case there is danger of confusion of thought. For it is not necessary, in returning to the historical data for faith, to assume that there is antagonism or contradiction between the data and the faith, between the concrete reality of the Gospel Portrait and the judgment of faith which assigns to that reality the character expressed in the long-accepted doctrine of the Person of Christ. What may very justly be assumed is the fact that in the case of many who hold in a vague way the Christian faith, the presentation of Christ has been to a great extent evacuated of reality. The Christ of the Creeds may remain and may in truth be in substance a just presentation of the historical Jesus. But being detached from the historical picture, He may be sublimated, He may be, so to speak, intellectually "in the air." The true corrective

and support of faith is the history. There can be no true Christ for faith who is not the Christ of History. The importance of the distinction should never be overlooked, but should not be unduly pressed either way.

It is assumed by some that the image of Christ has been as matter of fact obscured by the definitions of the Church. To some extent this may be admitted. But the loss has not necessarily been on the strictly theological side. Even of the idea of God it is not quite certain that the strictly theological treatment of it is an aid to clearer spiritual vision. While therefore the presentation of Christ in the Creeds may be regarded as obscuring the historical image of Christ in the Gospels, this may be an absolute necessity of the mode of presentation. To set forth in balanced form "the truth as it is in Jesus" is a work totally different from the work of presenting the concrete outlines of the life of Jesus. The one is history, the other a philosophy of history. The one finds

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the facts, the other explains or guards against false explanations. Neither is complete without the other. Hence a true Christology implies a true life of Christ, and a true life is impossible without a true Christology. This may appear an argument in a circle, but it is not really so. "Come and see" has from the first been associated with "is not this the Christ?" The facts prompted the question, and the question gave the key to the facts. The Creeds have not necessarily hindered faith. Indeed, through long periods of decline they have enshrined it. Only when they have stood in the way of a living faith, acting as barriers instead of guides in the garden of truth, can this be truly said.

## II.

Granting the justice of this claim on behalf of the dogmatic faith of the Church, we may yet go on to admit that the historical figure

of Christ, the picture of the Gospel story, the gracious personality, the flawless consciousness, the winsome yet awe-inspiring teacher, the beloved Master, the loving Friend, the silent sufferer, have often seemed to be lost under the remote abstractions which have seemed necessary in the construction of an intellectual definition of the Person of Christ. Yet as we have said this is no necessary condemnation of the definition itself. Just, as in the statement of some great law of the physical world, language is employed which seems far removed from the concrete reality, yet such language is seen to be necessary to give universality to the definition. The law of gravitation is a simple example. It is a dry abstract statement, yet beneath its balanced phrases lies the whole cosmic harmony of created things, from the fall of the apple which generated the idea in the great philosopher's mind to the rush of worlds in the inconceivable depths of space. The concrete

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reality of things is not obscured or distorted, but brought into rhythmic unity under the grasp of a far-reaching principle. So also the real defence of dogmatic statement is the necessity for unifying principle. It has been found especially so with regard to the Person and work of Christ. For, what is called the concrete reality, or "the fact of Christ," presents so many sides to thought, that unity becomes a crying necessity, and unity for thought is impossible apart from definition or at least a working hypothesis.

It may be that, especially in periods of Christian history when the theological interest obscures the religious, Jesus is exchanged for a definition; ideas take the place of realities; doctrines displace the Saviour. But this danger will never be entirely absent from any attempt to set forth in reasoned thought the faith of the Church. Whatever reconstructions may await us they will still be subject to correction from the facts. New

categories may replace the old, but they also in their turn must stand the test of *all* the facts.

Nothing but good can ultimately come of renewed and deepened interest in the historical life. One supreme benefit to faith must be the transference of intellectual as well as emotional emphasis to Christ Himself. The reconstruction to be hoped for is not so much a modification of traditional Christology as such a statement of doctrine as will make it veritably a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ.

Much may be learned by recalling the course of theological and religious effort during the last two or three generations. That effort has centred on the Person of Christ. The literature bearing upon the life of Christ and cognate subjects is immense. But the motive pervading all is the desire to "see Jesus," to get behind the abstract statement of the Creeds, and to come into contact with the actual Personality of Christ. This long effort

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of critical scholarship is indeed far from spent, but its course has been marked by such a variety of results, by the rise and fall of so many conflicting views, that we may to some extent estimate its probable effect on the future.

The results so far may be summarised in the statement that the substantial truth of the Gospel narrative has been amply vindicated, that the human environment of Christ and His Work is clearer than it has been to Christian thought since the days of the first disciples, and that the historical reality of Christ is the centre of living interest. Along with these results we find also another not unnatural thought, for the time disconcerting and distressing to faith. There have been brought into sharp apparent contradiction, or at least contrast, the two aspects of Christ's Person which were believed to be blended in the historic definition of the Creeds. We have presented to us the Christ of history and the

Church's conception of Christ. The question is sharply raised whether these two are compatible, whether the faith covers the facts. Thus the point of view has been largely changed. The history has come to the front. The first question is as to "the fact of Christ." Now for the increased attention paid to the life of Christ there have been several reasons, but it is probably true that dissatisfaction with traditional statements of Christianity was the main reason. It is certain that on both sides of the great controversy this has provoked renewed study of the life. Certain expressions were found in the Creeds which did not seem to have had exact parallels in the Gospels, and the obvious question was whether they could be correlated.

### III.

For many among us the historic view of Christ's Person, and even the traditional

reverence for Christ's character, seem to have melted into an incoherent vagueness. With some it may even be that this vagueness is scarcely to be distinguished from practical unbelief, retaining as it does little, if any, of the fervour of personal devotion, which has unquestionably been a mark of Christian faith, and also a moulding power in the spiritual life of humanity. So palpable is this phase of opinion, and so characteristic of our recent religious history, that it forces upon many the question whether we are not approaching, whether, indeed, we have not already reached, an intellectual crisis, in which the distinctive note of the Church's faith in Christ may pass away for many who still hold the Christian name, and in which Christendom itself may again be rent in twain. In such a case the point of divergence would be, not as in the division between East and West, a purely metaphysical relationship within the Being of God, not as in the Reformation controversy, ■

question of the means of personal salvation through a Divine Saviour whom all alike acknowledged, but a question absolutely vital and fundamental as to Him in whom the Church has declared her faith as the Son of God, the Revealer of the Father, and the Saviour of men.

Are we then at the parting of the ways, or have we, as some seem to think, gone beyond that point? Has this division of Christendom, less obvious but more subtle and far-reaching than ecclesiastical distinctions, already taken place, and is it already bearing fruit? It is hardly necessary to go so far as to affirm that such is actually the case, but there is abundant evidence of uncertainty and distress. When we compare the general tone of modern theological literature with that even of the past generation, the change is at once obvious. The old dogmatism is affected by a certain hesitancy. The religion of authority is confronted by the religion of the spirit, as if there

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were an essential antagonism. And, though the latter may not have been able very clearly to define itself, the conflict is not altogether without promise of important result.

One result has certainly been to show the danger of too great literalness in the interpretation of Scripture, and to shake confidence in the validity of some accepted interpretations, which may have threatened to endanger fundamental spiritual truth. It has become more possible to distinguish between the permanent and the temporary, the eternal and the changing in matters of faith, and to disentangle the essential substance of truth from its theoretic setting. In no case has this been more anxiously sought than with regard to the Person, Character, and Influence of Christ. It may be that this is so because of the central importance of the theme, and its relation to all other aspects of Christian truth. But, undoubtedly, for good or ill, the change of emphasis has taken place. Attention has

meanwhile been more and more withdrawn from the presentation of Christ in the dogmatic expressions of the Creeds, and concentrated on the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It has even been asserted that we probably know Jesus more fully than He has been known since the age of the Apostles, though this of course can only apply with the limitation of St Paul, "according to the flesh." What the final result of this change of emphasis will be time alone can tell.

Meanwhile both its cause and its effect are to be seen in the renewed study of the sources of our religion, which cannot but be good. The historical movement which has affected every domain of investigation has been specially influential in the field of Theology, and particularly in that part of the field which is concerned with the history and Person of Christ.

Especially in two directions is this influence apparent. It has shown that Christianity

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has important elements in common with other religions. And this is in itself a conception fruitful of great results. For it has led to the abandonment of the old idea of the ethnic religions as only so many forms of error, and it has inspired the endeavour to show that “the conception of Christ stands related to history as the idea of God is related to nature—*i.e.*, each is in its own sphere the factor of order, or the constitutive condition of a rational system.” In other words, “the Son of God holds in His pierced hands the key of all religions, explains all the factors of their being, and all the persons through whom they have been realised.” It is thus in regard to the Person of Christ that the historical movement has been most distinctly felt. This change of attitude is sometimes described in terms which may be regarded as a begging of the question. It is no doubt convenient to speak of the Christ of History, of the Christ of Metaphysics, and of the Christ

of Experience. But crispness of phrase may readily shelter error, and it is well to keep a sharp outlook on distinctions which may be only valid for analytic thought. The truth is that there must be in some sense a unity of all three unless Christ, even on the human side, be left as a mere chimera.

But the reason for the distinction thus drawn is to be found in this change of attitude. The emphasis has been transferred from the doctrine to the facts, or reality, of the Incarnation. Here, again, it may be observed that Christological opinion has been determined or coloured by the general trend of the historical movement. Of that movement nothing is more characteristic than the importance attached to the facts of life. We are called to look at them in themselves, and to see in them not something extraneous which must be stripped off before we can penetrate to certain divine realities. They are in themselves a revelation of those realities. This is

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the new view of history, and it is obviously inconsistent with any view of Christianity which ignores its relation to the whole world-process, and fails to recognise what has been called its cosmic significance. When history is thus regarded as a continued creative process, it is plain that the point of view of religion must undergo change. Hence, it is natural to find that the emphasis is now laid on life rather than thought as its highest expression.

Accordingly, we find that the approach to the study of Christ is made through the recorded facts of His life. Almost a truism in itself, this statement nevertheless describes a practical revolution in Christological science, and when the full harvest is gathered in, it will probably show a great enrichment of the idea of the Incarnation. Already it has borne fruit. It has forced to the front the conception of Christianity as a Person and a Life, rather than a philosophy or a law.

## IV.

In keeping with these two immediate results of the historical movement is the recognition of the legitimacy of what is called a return to Christ. For not only is our religion historical, having a definite origin in time and place, but it is also intimately bound up with Christ Himself. To be a Christian is to stand in a certain attitude towards Christ, to share His Spirit, to possess at least in a measure His Mind.

It is natural therefore that religious inquiry should continually recur to the historic career of the Founder of our faith, nor is it unnatural that men should seek to get behind even the recorded impression and touch, if may be, the very Christ Himself. There is certainly a strong current of thought among us which takes this direction. It is indeed the modern parallel to the spirit which prompted those Greeks who came to Philip and desired him, saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

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Now there must be some good reason why in our day this inquiry has become so clamant and insistent. That reason is not remote, and we may well ask how far the desire is legitimate, how far it can really be met, and what is the true answer to a yearning in which all thoughtful men must share.

When we ask for the cause of this modern cry we find that cause and effect are mingled. For if we say that it has led to a renewed study of the life of Christ we also see that it is this renewed study that has quickened the desire to get into closer touch with the historical reality of His Personality and Career. Those among us who are disturbed by the passing phases of religious opinion should take heart of grace in remembering that the historic faith of Christ has passed through many storms in days gone by, and still remains as an anvil on which many hammers have been and will be broken. A century has passed since the keen and searching eyes of sceptical historical criticism

turned with renewed intensity upon the Gospel Narrative. And this, it has been pointed out, was one of the main causes that contributed to the modern revival of interest in the life of Christ. Men had become weary of the abstractions of theology; they had passed through a chilling spell of rationalism; and the evangelicalism of the beginning of the nineteenth century had warmed many hearts and ennobled many lives. But men were also on the eve of other movements, some of Church revival, some of scientific negation. Physical science was girding herself for her great triumphs. And later on came a great wave of materialistic philosophy which has not yet spent itself. But just then came what must have seemed to many the destruction of all faith in the supernatural meaning of the life and mission of Jesus Christ. This was the publication in 1835 of the life of Jesus by David Frederick Strauss.

We may wonder now at the alarm excited by a book which is seen to be so comparatively

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meagre and inadequate for the purpose, because it sought to reduce the life of Jesus to a mere “tissue of myths” and left the origin of Christianity a hopeless riddle. But the fear was genuine in many minds, and the shipwreck of faith was no uncommon result. Yet the movement started by the book was nevertheless a blessing in disguise. For it forced men to face the facts. And the result has been to preserve for us the living portrait of Christ as He lived, and to vindicate “the substantial truth of the Gospel narrative.” Even within our generation, with a keenness never before exceeded, the eyes of men have scanned the records of that life which is the source of all we call Christian in the world; scholarship has lavished its powers on the transcendent theme, and still with increasing eagerness the noble quest proceeds. From every side of opinion, the teaching, career, and personality of Christ have been studied anew. Geography, criticism, history—all have contributed to the

fulfilment of this high task. The most thoroughly equipped and vigorous intellects, better still the most thoroughly disciplined wills and open hearts, have been dedicated to the work. Believers and unbelievers, scientists and philosophers, poets and painters, exact scholars and religious mystics, all have pressed round like the Greeks in the Gospel, their one impelling motive being "we would see Jesus."

Can this be otherwise than good? Is not the instinct legitimate, and has it not been fruitful of rich results? Unquestionably so. The life of Christ has emerged into clearness never before attained. His outward acts have been examined, His inner consciousness has been searched, His words have been studied, and all this has been done with such earnestness, with such manifest love of truth, with such spiritual insight that the gain must be great in enabling us to understand His teaching and to appreciate His life and work in what is called their human environment. In all this there

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can be nothing but good for the Church and for the individual soul. To know Jesus Christ as He is offered to us in the Gospel must be the foundation of all faith and hope.

But in the phrase "Back to Christ" there is a suggestion or a hint which may cover a serious fallacy. One has a kind of natural suspicion of all such crisp phrases, so many of them beg the whole question. So here while there is a manifest truth there is also an obvious error. It asks for impossibility. The past is past. It cannot be recreated. It is a memory. The life has been lived; the words have been spoken; they have entered into the life of the world as abiding and transforming influences. It is a fond imagination that we can go back in the sense of cutting off the entire stream and beginning again at the fountain-head. The great river of Christian thought and life is flowing on with increasing width and volume. It is true that it has swept into it many apparently alien elements. It is true that it

has been coloured by influences from this side and from that. It is true that it has absorbed many tributary streams of human thought. But may it not be that this is part of the essential power of Christianity, that in its progress through the world it shall touch to nobler issues all that is real in the world's life, and in a sense grander than the vision of Ezekiel, "Everything shall live whither the river cometh"?

Certain it is that for the source and spring of our spiritual life we must always return to Him Who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Because we believe in the living Christ we can go for guidance and correction to the record of His Incarnate Life. "But we cannot," as has been said, "retrace our steps in the manner sometimes advocated. We cannot reproduce the Christianity of the first century, for the plain reason that eighteen centuries of Christian life have passed between that time and this. We can no more root

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out Hellenism from our religion than from our literature, and if we could the residuum would not be Christianity." The truth is, "that all that historical reverersions can do" (the words are those of an acute thinker of our time) "is to suggest that in the onward movement something precious has been left behind which it were well to recover before going further, . . . the Christianity we go back to is not in the past; it is seen through the arch of experience, the gleams of that untrodden world to which we move. To seek it in the past is to seek the living among the dead. The gates of Paradise are eternally open."

Now in so saying let me not be misunderstood. It is idle to deny that the movement has had valuable results, and that much may still flow from it to enrich Christian thought and to quicken Christian life. It has had one great effect of forcing to the front the Person of Christ as the centre of Christian thought.

It has called attention to the true simplicity of the religion of Jesus Christ. And it has shown that the medium of revelation is not primarily doctrine but a life. "The life was the light of men." Thus the movement has not been all or mainly negative. It has enabled men to see that the doctrines of the faith have come into their historic shape through a living process of thought, and that they rest ultimately on the life and teaching of Christ and the experience of Christian believers. It has laid emphasis on the truth that the beginning of Christianity is neither a theological idea nor a moral precept, but an experience of a fact, "the fact of Christ revealing and imparting the life of God." Where it has laid itself open to suspicion is in the use of phrases which keep the word of promise to the ear and break it to the sense. Thus when we are told in the language of St Paul that "God was in Christ" we

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see that for some who use the words they mean no more than a vague pantheism, and the suggestion forced upon us is not without justification that such a view of Christ's Person is only humanitarianism again, naked but still un-ashamed.

## V.

While therefore we recognise the spiritual value of the return to Christ let us not be blind to its limitations and dangers. It remains true that we must turn to the sources for the picture of our Lord. But it also remains true that there entered into the world through Him an influence which has increasingly manifested its powers in the lives of Christian believers. Whatever be the true essence of Christianity one thing is clear, Christianity *is* and *has been* and *will be*. It is yet in a sense in its infancy. Only yesterday it seemed to be dismissed as a thing whose "course was nearly run." To-day the same contemptuous phrase

may be heard, and to-morrow it will not be silent. But Christianity will still be there, and still will it present its claim to meet the mystery of the world, the mystery of sin, and the mystery of the future life. It will take new forms and stir men to new thoughts. As it absorbed Greek thought and Roman law, it will go on to absorb and quicken all phases of human thought and activity. And as in the past so in the future there will be Christian lives, manifesting the power of Christ not in all its balanced perfection, yet in forms of winsome beauty which tell to the world that they have been with Jesus.

When, therefore, we ask for the true power of our Christian religion we are to look for it most certainly in Christ Himself, in Christ as He is offered to us in the Gospel; but no less in Christ as He has manifested His influence in history, in Christ as He has influenced human lives, in Christ not dead but risen and at the right hand of God, in

Christ glorified and exalted, Who is not only the Way to the Father but the Truth and the Life. The return to Christ is not merely a painful and weary process of historical analysis that we may see Him as He was in the streets and lanes of Palestine.

What, then, you ask is the true solution? It is indeed the question of questions. And Christianity for you and me might be an effete and dead thing if there were no real answer to our question. "We," too, "would see Jesus." Can we wait till all problems are solved, till all differences of view are harmonised, till we can see not through a glass darkly but face to face? Is it thus that the Church has lived, is it thus that saints by the power of God are kept? Not so has it been in days past, not so will it be in time to come. Let us remember that the difficulties of the intellect are not confined to the religious sphere, and let us never forget that they have not prevailed to hinder

that experience of the power of Christ which is the supreme reality of Christian history. It may be that days of stress and debate are upon us when, as in the earlier centuries, men strove to define the highest verities of the faith. It may be that the religious thinking of our time is hesitating before the mystery of Godliness, standing awestruck "before the perfection of Christ's human character, within the sacred processes of which it wistfully looks for the mystery of His Divinity and the secret of God." But, while as of old, definition is difficult, and at the best can only rebut error, there is abundant evidence that this search for Christ has borne fruits which will make it harder than ever to explain the Christian faith as a merely human product, and to displace Christ from the central position of His own Gospel.

What, after all, is it to you or me to have our imagination quickened by vivid descriptions of Jesus as He lived in Palestine, to know the geography of the Holy Land, to realise the

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kind of house in which He lived? What have we really gained of moral or spiritual value when, as has been said, "the scenery of the Lake of Genesareth has become as vivid to" our "imagination as the scenery of Windermere, and the snows of Hermon as the snows of the Alps"? Are we any nearer to Christ as He is? Do we know Him any better than Philip, to whom He said, "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?"—Is this the kind of knowledge in which the Apostles found power and light and peace? Every word of their testimony points us elsewhere. Not "until His earthly life had been transfigured and interpreted by His Resurrection from the dead," not until He "was declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection of the dead"—not till then did they really see Jesus. And then Thomas, speaking for himself, spoke for all when he said in the Upper Room, "My Lord and my God." The true wonder

and power of our Lord's earthly life remain unknown until His Divinity becomes as real to us as His humanity, and we see in Him the glory of the Eternal.

It will be with our modern world as with the world of early Christian days. The impression of Christ's moral grandeur, of Christ's moral authority, of Christ's supreme claim to save and to inspire men with life, will produce the same results as it has done from the beginning. I believe also that the impression of His moral supremacy will impel men to see in Him the Judge of the future, to rejoice in Him as making ready an eternal home, to bow to His guidance as Life-giving Spirit, and to accept Him as sharing with the Father universal sovereignty—and thus to acknowledge Him—whatever be the phrase or form of definition—the Eternal Son of God and Saviour of men.

Meanwhile in many minds there has been left behind, ignored, or forgotten, that great

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illuminative thought of Apostolic teaching which shows the cry “back to Christ” in its one-sided poverty. “The mystical union with the glorified Christ is the very foundation of St Paul’s Christianity.” “Christ is all and in all.” “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” The gift of the Holy Spirit is the real continuance of the Incarnate Christ. This is the master thought which alone unlocks the mystery, which unites the Christ of the past with the Christ of to-day—for “the indwelling power which inspires all our best thoughts and actions is the same Spirit which breathed through every deed and word of Jesus Christ.”

And thus we return to the only satisfying answer to the craving of the human heart. If we would see Jesus we must come to Him as men have ever come under a sense of need. When He was on earth a strange longing drew men to His side and they came not in vain—the blind, the deaf, the lame, the palsied. Believing in His power to bless, trusting in

His mercy and grace, they came some for physical aid, some for spiritual counsel. He never failed them.

Nay more, He sent forth in His teaching the most marvellous and far-reaching invitations. "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink."—And in this call the note is universal, for all times and for all lands, excluding all other teachers and presenting Himself as the sole Saviour of men. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." When we interpret this invitation of Christ in the light of the Cross and the throne, then we know that, though we may not see Christ in the flesh, we may truly behold Him by the eye of faith, and we may realise the truth that brings Him near to us, for "He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near to God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

It is a deep truth of our religion that

“whosoever willeth to do His will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” The return to Christ is by faith and obedience, by penitence and love, through faith to fuller knowledge, through increasing knowledge to deeper love, by the simple submission that brings the childlike mind and a deepening consciousness of that spiritual presence which, though we may not yet reach so great a height, enabled St Paul to say, “To me to live is Christ.” So true is it that “Jesus Christ can never be the soul’s master upon the single basis of historical proof. The walls of space and time and circumstance must fall back that to an ever-present, ever-living Lord” we may yield a full and glad obedience.

In this sense only can there be full satisfaction to the universal yearning, “We would see Jesus.”

## THE PROPORTION OF FAITH.



## II.

### THE PROPORTION OF FAITH.

#### I.

IT is a saying of Emerson that Christianity has dwelt, and still dwells with noxious exaggeration on the Person of Jesus. To what extent he was justified in the somewhat offensive phrase with which he sought to emphasise his statement it is unnecessary to inquire. It is sufficient that historical Christianity recognised in the Person of Jesus the Citadel of faith, and therefore, eliminating the offensive epithet, we may accept the statement as an obvious commentary on Christian history. The Person of Jesus has been, and still is, the central theme of interest to those

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who accept historic Christianity, and to those who reject it. Nor does there seem much likelihood that the point of emphasis in religious and theological thought will, in the near future at least, be sensibly or permanently displaced.

Speaking broadly then we may assert that Christianity has presented itself to the world under the form of the Church's faith in the Person of Christ as the Eternal Son of God. So far as it has impressed itself, as a living spiritual power, on the minds and consciences of men, this is characteristic of our religion. It has offered to men for their veneration and love the Divine-Human Personality of Jesus Christ. This presentation, whatever may be thought of its ultimate justification, is unquestionably a fact most patent and impressive in Christian history. It is therefore not only admissible, but absolutely in accordance with facts, to speak of the Church's faith in the

Person of Christ as distinctive in this sense of historical Christianity.

Now, in the practical life of the Church there are three different spheres, which may for convenience be described as Evangelical, Ethical, and Institutional, corresponding to familiar distinctions of opinion. In each of these there has always been a tendency to emphasise unduly some point of doctrine or practice, and the consequence has been a certain displacement in the proportion of faith. And yet, behind each of these displacements, we may trace necessities of thought, which exalt rather than detract from the Church's faith in the Person of Christ. In the Evangelical sphere of Church life, for example, the tendency has been to make the Atonement all prominent, yet this faith in Christ's Person is a necessary foundation. Again the same faith is seen to be necessary as a justification for Ethical appeal. So also in the Institu-

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tional sphere of Church life. It is seen to be a necessary presupposition, for the validity, and above all for the Spiritual value of Christian ordinances.

It may thus serve a useful purpose to illustrate these points a little more fully, in order to show that, while in each of the three instances just given there is a constant tendency to depart from the true balance and proportion of faith, there is also an indirect testimony to the necessity and central importance of the faith in Christ's Person.

Remembering that these three spheres of the Church's life are not coincident with the boundaries of separate Churches, but are found more or less in all, we may see that in certain extremes of Evangelicalism and of Romanism there has been a practical displacement of the faith not intentional, but through undue emphasis. A disposition to dwell with one-sided intensity on the suffering Saviour has sometimes led to emotional extravagance and irreverent famili-

arity. The Man of Sorrows fills the foreground of thought, and obscures the Son of God. Hence there is an unconscious slackening of faith, in the sense historically characteristic of the Church. A true conception of the value and meaning of Christ's Passion is inseparable from a true conception of His Person, but to lay emphasis on His Work apart from Himself is to encounter dislocation and confusion of thought. Faith in Christ the Saviour cannot be maintained apart from faith in Christ the Son of God.

Then again exaggeration may and does appear from another side. Take, for instance, what many regard as the undue exaltation of Mary the Mother of Jesus. There is no doubt that the Church's faith in the Person of Christ stands related in a very special manner to her of whom it is said in Scripture that all generations shall call her blessed. But, under the appearance of deeper reverence for the fact of the Incarnation, does there not lurk the danger of a perversion

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of thought and feeling which is only too apt to put in a secondary place Him to whom alone Mary owes what is her due of reverential regard? In this displacement it may be said that bane and antidote are strangely mixed. Mariolatry, as it is sometimes called, draws both its strength and weakness from the intensity of its hold on the Church's Faith in the Person of Christ. But it is an exaggeration or over-emphasis of the faith, and consequently may and often does result in a loss of personal devotion to Christ Himself.

Thus in both of these cases we have indirect testimony, even through practical displacement, to the necessity of the essential faith.

Then again, when we turn to those forms or schools of teaching which have laid special emphasis on the Ethical principles of Christianity, and the moral example of Christ, there has often appeared a tendency to sublimate the faith in Christ's Person. The example of Christ is regarded quite properly from the purely

human side. Yet in the process, it may be not at all of set purpose, though none the less effectually, this emphasis on Christ's human example, being unduly pressed, obscures other aspects of His Unique Personality. There arises the objection that Christ's example is morally worthless, if He be regarded as divine, and that temptation for instance is in His case unreal. Yet when this objection is closely examined it suggests, if pressed, a still greater difficulty for thought and life. This is the obvious question of the Authority of Christ. Apart from the faith, as it has been historically held, we have to ask what is the value of Christ's Teaching either by word or Example? All Ethical teaching must justify itself by exhibiting a convincing standard, a sufficient sanction, and an adequate motive.

How does Christ's teaching thus justify itself? The answer is far from clear on any humanitarian view of Christ's Person. It is absolutely simple along the lines of the Church's faith.

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The standard of Christian Ethics is defined by Christ Himself—"Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"; the Sanction is found in Christ's words—"I have received of My Father"; "The word which ye hear is not Mine but My Father's which sent Me." The motive is offered in the oft-repeated claim—"For My sake."

Now the implications of these three apparently simple statements are tremendous and far-reaching, and they constitute when taken together one of the strongest confirmations of the essential faith of the Church in the Person of Christ. While therefore we may not forget that this faith may be so held as to weaken the sense of responsibility, and, as it has sometimes happened, to substitute rigid orthodoxy for moral integrity, it is quite undeniable that the Ethical impulse in the long run dies away, when separated from definite conviction of the reality of its source in the Divine Person of Christ.

Christian Ethics cannot survive the abandonment of Christian Faith.

Another displacement of the true emphasis of the faith appears in what I have called the institutional sphere of Christian experience, where, by an unconscious exaggeration, a tendency is evident to substitute the Church for Christ, or at least to obscure the reality of His personal claims even in the use of His ordinances. Quite justly are Church and Sacrament given a place of high prominence. But to explain the life in the Church, and the Spiritual value of Christian ordinances, is an absolute impossibility apart from the Church's Faith in the Person of Christ. Where the Sacrament is regarded as an *opus operatum* it may still be valid argument that it is so only through the Grace of Christ. But the practical result can only be a divorce of thought and reverence from Christ Himself. The extreme form of this type of teaching is found in the maxim, which is either a truism or a heresy,

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—no salvation outside the Church—“Extra ecclesiam nulla salus,”—which can only be true when to it is added, “Ubi Christus ibi ecclesia”—where Christ is there is the Church.

Thus it is unquestionable that within the Church itself there have been practical displacements of the faith, and these have occurred in connection with each of the three spheres of her life. Under each indeed there has sometimes been wholesale departure, as in the Unitarianism of the Midlands and New England, in the Scepticism of the eighteenth century, and in the practical paganism which has always been the last refuge of obscurantism. In the main, however, these displacements have reacted to confirm the faith itself; and emphasis laid on one aspect of truth has compelled recognition of its inherent integrity—alike in its Evangelical, ethical, and institutional sphere—so that the characteristic note has persisted, the Church’s faith has remained, and she has still continued

to dwell, not with exaggeration, but with reverence, on the Person of Christ.

## II.

Now place alongside of this practical experience the historic search, especially prominent in our time, for a single principle which, with or without Christ, shall describe the essence of Christianity. It is a mistake to suppose that this attempt is only characteristic of modern theological thought. It has no doubt attracted many distinguished scholars of our time, whose names command respect in the intellectual world, and it has produced many notable results which cannot fail to affect general Christian thought. But, though the modern attempt has been remarkably spirited, and has a distinct character of its own, it cannot be separated from the stream of historic Christian inquiry.

I pass over here many points, that might be

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justly raised, as to the form of the modern search for the essence of Christianity. There are evidently two lines of inquiry,—the first being to search for the original impetus of the faith, and the second, to compare this with the actual implications of the faith, as expressed in the historic Creeds of the Church, with the purpose of determining how far the essential faith has been preserved.

There is one aspect of Christianity which must be acknowledged—it is a historic religion; and there is one claim of Christianity which must be recognised—its claim to be the absolute religion for man, which meets every essential religious need and satisfies every permanent religious instinct. That Christianity makes this claim is abundantly clear. It is certainly not clear that it can make good this claim on any basis which would not include the essential truth of the Church's faith in Christ the Son of God.

Take the first teachers of Christianity. They regarded it as a development of Judaism, but

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they were conscious of a distinctive principle, of something to which Judaism only pointed. To St Paul Christianity was the power of God unto salvation ; to St John it was the manifested life ; to St Peter it was the embodiment of an Eternal purpose in Jesus Christ ; to St Jude it was union with God through Christ ; and of St James it has been truly said that his whole religious life had Jesus for its centre and foundation. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the absolute and distinctive character of Christianity lies in the Person of Christ.

Pass to the first Apologists, for whom it was peculiarly necessary to find a compendious statement of the new faith. Compelled to defend it against two fires, they had to justify its distinctive note as an advance upon Judaism, and to commend a religion which traversed Paganism at every point. They distinctly declared it to be the one religion which had existed from the beginning, though not fully understood till Christ came. They were appar-

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ently more concerned to exhibit the historic character of Christianity than to show its distinctive feature. Justin Martyr, for instance, identifies it with true Judaism, and Irenæus takes the same line. With Origen also it is regarded as a higher stage of Judaism. In this remarkable man of daring genius there is a note of modernism, for he seems to regard Christianity itself as a passing stage in divine revelation destined to be outgrown. Needless to say the Church has consistently declined to accept the distinction, and to draw the line between historic faith and eternal truth. Though between Christianity and other forms of thought and life there seemed to be a gulf fixed, yet for the great thinkers of the early Church, for men like Athanasius, Basil, the Gregories, and above all St Augustine, the bridge was found in the Christo - centric position, and this view as we shall see later was substantially maintained down to the Reformation. Throughout the Reformation controversy

the same view of Christianity as an absolute religion, imperfectly understood till Christ came, held the field. It was reserved for the later Reformers to bring out its original note as well as its historical character, for Christ is the pledge of the fulfilment of the promises, and grace is finally manifested in Christ.

When we come to modern times new principles have arisen into prominence which have powerfully affected this line of inquiry. I have already spoken of the influence of the historical spirit. The transforming conception of development has entered into every field of investigation, and psychology has raised problems in forms, unknown before the rise of the critical philosophy. A new science of comparative religion has also arisen. We have only lately discarded our legacy of abstractions from the eighteenth century. From the currents and cross-currents of that age, with its religion of reason and its religion of nature, the faith of the Church in the Person of Christ

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has emerged to pass through new and more trying experiences.

The chief characteristic of modern attempts to define Christianity has been the effort to reduce it to a single principle. And the most memorable of these attempts has reduced the Gospel to Christ's proclamation of the Fatherhood. But, when we are called upon to accept this as the distinctive element of Christianity, we are compelled to ask whether this single principle can really explain Christian history, whether it is so central and original, whether it is intelligible apart from unique Sonship in Christ, whether after all Christianity can be described without Christ, whether the truth is not rather quite the reverse, that the moral authority of Christ's revelation of the Fatherhood rests finally on the moral weight of His character, on the uniqueness of His Person, on the self-verification of His Divine Claim.

It is an underlying assumption of the modern inquiry, that scholasticism both early

and late has overlaid the essential truth of Christianity by deductions more or less illegitimate, and that at an earlier stage the original conception of Christianity was affected by modes of thought and expression seriously transforming its character, and affecting indeed its essence. But even granting that there is some ground for these assumptions, even supposing we could not only remove so-called accretions, but also discover new modes of thought and expression, what then? Are we not obliged, as it has been pertinently asked, to conceive of God under categories within our reach? Does it follow that we could once more reduce Christianity to a minimum, stopping the life of truth to test its vitality, carrying back the stream when it has already gone forth to fertilise the fields, forgetting that in spiritual things as in physical the harvest is hid in the seed? Is there, in short, any candid way of escape from the position that we are to find what Christianity

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really is in the total impression made by Christ, in the continued influence of Christ, and in the testimony of Christian experience? There is no Christianity without Christ, and the Christian faith can only be described as faith in Christ.

### III.

As to the permanent elements of the faith, if a thoughtful Christian were asked to-day why he holds the faith of Christ, he would probably say because he has received it on the testimony of the Church, and verified it in experience, because the portraiture of Christ, in character, and consciousness, and claim, confirms that testimony, and because the influence Christ has exerted is only in this way intelligible. It is this threefold appeal, experience, Scripture, and history, which probably sustains the ordinary believer who accepts Christ as the Son of God and rightful Lord of men.

Now this attitude of what we may call the common faith is justified by the first experiences of Christian believers. For, though it be true that belief in the Resurrection became the foundation of the Church's faith in Christ, the Resurrection itself was only credible because of Christ's character, because of His moral supremacy already established in their hearts, because of His unique relationship to the Father, of which He gave constant proof, and because of the consistency between His personal claims and His personal experience. In the deepest sense of the words it was not possible that He should be holden of death. Thus the cogency of the fact of the Resurrection to confirm the Church's faith has always been due to its congruity with the facts and experiences of Christ's life. Without this it would be merely a fresh enigma.

The first element in the Church's faith then is the reality of Jesus. It is true that in the deluge of sceptical thought even this seems

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for some to have disappeared. It is surely the very madness of criticism, and can only be described as the last refuge of a small minority, who profess to be satisfied of the non-historicity of the Gospel of Jesus. It is impossible to regard this position in any other light than as a desperate shift to evade the whole problem of the presence of Christianity in the world. The most extreme among serious historical critics are agreed that we are justified in regarding the existence of Jesus as historically established. The ultimate element in the faith of the Church is the reality of Jesus.

The next is the actual portrait of Jesus. There is, of course, a permanent interest in the grave questions raised by investigation of the sources of our Knowledge of the Life of Jesus. But, in the faith of the Church, that life has never been separated from the present consciousness of its power. The records themselves are primarily the outcome

of this consciousness. The Church possessed and lived in the faith before any extant record came into existence. The first emergence of Christ in written Christian testimony is, indeed, of such a nature as to focus the central element in the Church's faith. In what is recognised as the earliest Christian writing He is set before the world as Risen and Glorified. We have a Christology, indeed, before we have a history. The true order, it has been said, is first faith in Christ, second faith in Scripture. "Our faith in Christ does not hang upon our faith in Scripture, but our faith in Scripture hangs upon our faith in Christ." It was the Gospel at the highest, in the climax of its majesty and importance, which formed the starting-point of the first oral teaching. It was the Crucifixion-Resurrection element of the story of Christ that made a Gospel possible, that made it necessary, that fired its first teachers.

## IV.

It is not possible here to discuss the wide question of the origin and authenticity of the Christian Scriptures. I content myself with quoting a recent writer on the four Gospels who, with characteristic moderation, sums up the position by saying—"It is little to say that the New Testament writings form a consistent and homogeneous whole, the Person of Christ being the Keystone which binds them all harmoniously into one, the spirit of Christ giving them their vitality and moral power."

It is true, we may add, that for wellnigh a century after the death of St Paul the faith of the Church can only be gathered from obscure sources and detached testimonies. But there is irrefutable evidence that a spiritual force is abroad in the world, which traces its source to Him Who was born of the Virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, rose

from Joseph's sepulchre, and ascended to God's right hand. And it is certain that "all this spiritual life goes back to those four Gospels already acknowledged to be pre-eminent, and exercising their primacy, because they alone and they sufficiently meet the spiritual necessities of the living Church of Christ. It was into the channels marked out by the four Gospels that there flowed all the traditions circulating among the first believers which were necessary for the faith and life of Christians."

Now this moderate view is independent of minute details, but it is absolutely in accordance with what is admitted by the most candid of critics, who still do not accept the full faith of the Church. Give all due weight to the difficulties of oral tradition, the power of the mythical tendency, the blending of opinions and facts, the apparent differences in the various writers. We have still a faithful fulfilment of their purpose to present a

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true picture of Him whose ministry they describe. As John Stuart Mill declared in a memorable passage, “It is no use to say that Jesus Christ as described in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been super-added by the tradition of His followers. Who among His disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, still less the early Christian writers.” We have, in short, a picture of Christ so accurate as to give us a true estimate of His teaching—a picture which accounts, as nothing else can, for the Church and the Church’s faith.

## V.

In this picture we still find those elements of the faith which it has ever been the

anxious and reverent task of the Church to combine in one consistent statement. A true manhood exhibiting all the characteristics of humanity, uniqueness of moral insight and purpose, a character and consciousness without a flaw, yet making the most exalted claims, believing Himself to be the Messiah, believing Himself to be the Son of God in a sense not applicable to other men. Here is a combination of self-assertion and absolute goodness utterly unthinkable in ordinary experience. "It is in the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the representative of God on Earth, and justified His claim by giving us in His life, death, and resurrection a self-authenticating revelation of God,—it is in this fact that the Church finds its explanation," and it is this figure, the figure of the Christ, that the Gospels present. We can believe of this Person what we can believe of no other.

It is to this point that all reverent study brings us, and it is here the Church has ever

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made the great venture of faith, claiming Christ as true man and true God. And here, notwithstanding displacements in practice and intellectual perplexities, she still stands secure in the depth of her Spiritual experience, and confirmed by the impression of Christ reflected in the minds and souls of the men of His own time.

To adjust these two aspects has ever been the problem of Christian thought. New difficulties arise with each new age. But the choice is ever between a purely humanitarian view and the essential faith of the Church. Whatever modifications or restatements may await us, it may confidently be affirmed that no conception of Christianity will justify itself to Scripture, to experience, or to history, which eliminates the essential truth on which the Church has rested of the Divine Person of Christ manifested in a Human life, giving authority to His teaching, sanction to His Ethical principles, and effective power to His

spiritual promises,—a faith which safeguards the Evangelical, the Ethical, and the Sacramental aspects of the Gospel,—providing for the necessary redemptive power, moral impulse, and continuous grace, and supplying amid the sway of opinion and practice within the Church that Centre of Spiritual Gravity which has ever rallied all true believers in love and loyalty to Christ.



THE HISTORIC FORMULATION OF  
THE FAITH.



### III.

#### THE HISTORIC FORMULATION OF THE FAITH.

How was the position reached which to this day marks the accepted and avowed public and official faith of Christendom in regard to Jesus Christ? This question covers a wide field, and cannot be answered without a broad survey of Christian history, over a period of four fruitful centuries, because it was not till the middle of the fifth century, to be quite precise not till the year 451, that the faith was formulated and finally declared in set terms, which till modern times have remained authoritative.

It is not necessary to quote here the full statement of the great Council in which the results of long controversies were gathered up.

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It is sufficient to say that in that statement the Church declared the four great landmarks of her thought about Christ,—that He is truly God, that He is perfectly man, that He is individually one, that He is unconfusedly two. In a memorable and classical passage of Richard Hooker's great work the position is succinctly stated: “To gather therefore into one sum all that hitherto hath been spoken touching this point, there are but four things which concur to make complete the whole state of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Deity, His Manhood, the conjunction of both, and the distinction of the one from the other being joined in one.” In short, the Historic Formulation of the Faith culminated in an affirmation which, while leaving the mystery of Christ's Person as still a problem for Christian thought, safeguarded the implicit faith of the Church in Jesus Christ our Lord, Son of God, and Son of Mary, God from everlasting, man for evermore.

## I.

Now it is a remarkable and impressive fact that amid the storms from without and dissensions within, this affirmation of the Church's faith has stood so long and so firmly, demanding and receiving the assent of Christendom. For though it safeguards the essential truth that Christ is God and man it goes no further. It is an affirmation, not an explanation. It simply sets down both sides of the common faith and there leaves them. Nevertheless this affirmation has been a veritable sheet-anchor of the faith, because while offering no solution it has preserved the permanent elements of the Church's faith in Christ, His true divinity, His true humanity, and the union of the two in their integrity in the historic Jesus. It is thus entitled to rank as the most significant historic expression of Catholic Christianity.

Certain it is that, since the time when it was finally declared, its weight and authority have been continuously acknowledged. The thought of Christ as at once truly God and truly man has held its place, not always unchallenged, it is true, but resisting attack and compelling assailants to recognise that it is "as the air invulnerable and their vain blows malicious mockery." Yet it would seem to many among us as if, after all, this central thought of the Church regarding Christ had fallen upon evil days, when by some subtler process it may at last be undermined and robbed of its spiritual power. Within the Church itself this process may have spread further than appears, for some caught unawares have awaked to find how far they have drifted from the central Christian thought of the one Divine Human Person of Christ.

Now, in speaking of apparent departure from the faith as historically formulated, we must distinguish between the attitude of the Church

in its universal and official aspect, and that of individual inquirers, however numerous. No branch of the Church has officially disclaimed the affirmation of the faith in the comprehensive terms of the formula of Chalcedon. It is common to Greek, Roman, Anglican, Presbyterian. It appears in all the historic confessions. It is the faith of Trent, of Augsburg, of Westminster. As such it is a bond of union amid many differences, and a ground of hope amid many counsels of despair. No doubt with many individuals it has become a problem rather than a conviction: and where the essential faith which it endeavours to set forth is not expressly denied it is often in effect ignored. It seems to be supposed that the principles and rules of life, which depend on it, may still be retained though the faith be deposed and dissolved. This is the underlying thought, pathetic and inconclusive, of some at least of present-day discussion of the theme. But the question must be asked in all serious-

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ness. Can we look for the results in life and conduct, and let the faith alone? Can we think aright about God without thinking aright about Christ?

This question once asked will inevitably go further, for it affects not merely the Christian conception of God, but every phase of Christian doctrine, worship, and life. The thought of the divine-human Personality of Christ has entered so deeply into the life of the Church that it is impossible to withdraw it and expect the structure to retain its stability. It may be that in the structure much straw and rubbish have been intermingled. But it is not these alone that would disappear were the chief corner-stone removed.

The old distinction between essentials and non-essentials is still of value, though the difficulty of drawing the line remains. In ordinary practice it seems to be drawn at the crucial point of acceptance of the elements of the faith, as historically formulated in Jesus

Christ. On the one side, divided on many points, but united in this, stand the great historic communions of the East and West, with the various bodies more or less widely separated. On the other, bodies also claiming the Christian name, cherishing Christian ideals, and enforcing the principles of Christian Ethics. Between these there would seem to be a great gulf fixed. But candour compels the admission that on the side where Christ's Divinity is expressly denied, there are often marvellous contradictions in the form of high Christian devotion and noble Christian service: and on the side where Christ's Divinity is expressly affirmed there are sometimes equally strange contradictions, in the form of individuals and even of Churches, barren and cold in Christian devotion and poor in Christian service. Like the Son in the parable, some who say "Yes" do not go, and some who say "No" press eagerly into the Vineyard.

Such results, illogical and unexpected, will

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always arise to perplex the fair-minded seeker after truth, and he will be well to keep in view the consolatory fact that the springs of human conduct are not seldom separated from the strict lines of logic. But he will not be wise to forget that in the broad issues of history and in the long run, human conduct is determined by convictions and principles which are no less real when they have become almost unconscious. Even in the least dogmatic of Christian centuries Christ has been the inspirer of Christian life and the ultimate sanction of Christian ethics. Nor have the essential principles of the faith as formulated been at any time far removed from the spiritual and beneficent activities of the Church, which found in the definitions of the great Councils a rallying-point for all her energies.

What these formulated definitions were intended to safeguard has never really been in doubt. We may hesitate over their meta-

physics, we may question their philosophical consistency, we may disclaim their categories: we cannot doubt what they mean to be at. Indeed, it is just possible that some of the intellectual irritation, professedly caused by the dogmatic precision of the historic Creeds, may be due to the clearness with which they bring out the essential truth of the Church's faith in the divine-human Personality of Christ.

It is important, however, to remember that the formulated definitions of the faith which culminated in 451 are statements, or, as we have seen, affirmations and not explanations. It is clear also that they were elicited by attempts to explain, and were intended to veto various unsatisfactory explanations. One by one these imperfect and one-sided attempts were negatived. The Church continued to affirm both sides of the mystery, not giving up the master-thought of the Unity of God, but proclaiming the manifoldness of His Being; not yielding the true Divinity of Christ, yet

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maintaining His true humanity. "And so it has come about," to quote the words of a well-known philosophical writer, "that while such simplifications as those of the Arians, for example, are so alien and impossible to modern modes of thought, that, if they had been incorporated with Christianity, they must have destroyed it, the doctrine of Christ's Divinity still gives reality and life to the worship of millions of pious souls, who are wholly ignorant, both of the controversy to which they owe its preservation and of the technicalities which its discussion has involved."

One consideration must be borne in mind when we approach the historic formulation of the faith. The Church had no choice in the matter. She was compelled to set the faith in reasoned form. Technicalities arose around the simple Gospel language, but the simple Gospel language was being explained away. The struggle was always for an essentially Christian principle, and by no means for a

mere speculative formula. As Athanasius, the great protagonist of the faith, declared, "our contest is for our all." No man regretted more than he the insufficiency and danger of the new terminology which came into use. But when the great essential truth of Christianity seemed to be at stake there was no alternative. The language which lay to hand was the only language possible. And this will be true to the end. New categories may replace the old; they in turn may be discarded. The lesson will ever be the same, that "Christ is truer than any science of Him," that any formulation of the faith is at the best a human approximation to the reality, that behind the reasoned thought of the Creeds is "something truer still, something behind it all—and that something is the Lord Himself." While therefore we enter with mingled feelings into the record of the controversy which in those early centuries raged around the faith of the Church in the Person of Christ, we

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may well agree with a great master of this sacred science who, referring to the first of the critical stages in the formulation of the faith, declared, “We shall esteem it a special favour of providence that the conscience of the Church was appealed to for its testimony and confession, while it still retained its (primitive) certificate and authority, and that thus at the commencement of its voyage a beacon was enkindled to mark the Church’s pathway across the stormy seas which lay before it.”

## II.

Now it is impossible to follow in detail her course across the stormy seas, for the winds of controversy blew strong and wild for many long years. It took the Church four centuries indeed to find proper terms in which to express the mystery of Christ’s Person, and even then the terms remain only partially comprehensible. The problem engaged the

intellectual energy and spiritual insight of the greatest minds of the time. The controversy was marked by an almost tragic intensity of devotion and suffering, blended at times with passion and pitiful time-serving. It is a record of glory and shame, but it preserved for the Church her precious heritage of truth.

Four stages mark the progress of the great debate. Each of these is marked in turn by a new difficulty and a fresh affirmation. Let me attempt to state them as briefly as possible.

Remember that the faith of the Church was implicit already. Hitherto the language of Scripture had sufficed. To the Church as a whole Jesus is the Lord, the Son of God Himself. But the demand came for reasoned thought. In what sense is He the Son of God? From Pagan as well as Jewish sources the question was pressed. Some began to describe Him as a mere human teacher; others as a kind of intermediary

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being between God and man. At length an acute stage was reached and the Church was moved from end to end.

### III.

At the school of Alexandria, already famous as a centre of learning, Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology had met in the person of illustrious teachers, and with results of momentous consequence. It had given to the Church two of the noblest masters in the Divine Science. But there was a danger in the wide philosophy of the school to which narrow minds were liable. Their speculations had exercised a fascination over the logical but somewhat hard and prosaic mind of a Presbyter named Arius, a man described as of contracted intellect without the intuitive faculty. Arius had seized with exaggerated literalness on the scriptural title, Son of God, and pushed it to its extremity, ignoring

other aspects of Christ's relations to the Father. Founding on this, Arius declared that the Son was a creature of the Father. He was willing to worship Christ. He was willing to acknowledge that Christ was super-human, but, "there was when He was not." Christ to him was a created being, though not a mere man.

Now there is a certain attractiveness to many minds in the Arian position. It seems to remove a mystery and to offer a feasible theory by which men may still adore and reverence Christ. Yet it only removes one mystery to create others. It comes dangerously near to a crude polytheism, such as we seem to be approaching once more from other points of view. Indeed there is a constant recrudescence of Arian opinion. And we can well understand how it became so powerful as to threaten the destruction of the faith. It has hovered on the path of the Church ever since as "a watchful foe."

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Witness the experience of Presbyterianism in England, in the north of Ireland, in New England, and the notable revival of Arianism in Poland in the seventeenth century. "Even now, perhaps," says Dr Bright, "the Arian view has its supporters who deem it a platform that can be occupied between Orthodoxy and Unitarianism; it is, as experience has often shown, no platform but a slope."

This was certainly the view of the Fathers of the Church, who through a maze of political intrigue and theological evasion followed the strong lead of Athanasius, and arrived at a decision which has guided the Church ever since. It is the immortal distinction of that great man, "the royal-hearted Athanase," to have seized the moral and spiritual issue involved and to have lifted the question out of the web of fruitless speculation on the absolute Being of God. The Nicene Creed, which was the outcome of the struggle, offers no definition

of the nature of God. It affirms only that side of His nature which is implied in “the practical and cardinal truth of the Divine Nature of Christ,” the very and eternal God-head of our Lord. It affirms, in short, the true Divinity of Christ.

#### IV.

The second stage of the controversy concerned the true Manhood of Christ and was no less vital to the faith. It was indeed a natural sequel to the first. Over-emphasis in affirming the Divinity of Christ led to inevitable displacement of the truth. A fresh outbreak of the condemned heresy took place. There even came a time when, as St Jerome said, “the whole world groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian.” But the new danger arose from mistaken reverence, and a growing unwillingness to face the facts of Christ’s human experience. There sprang up a kind of mystical sensitiveness which disdained the

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full meaning of the condescension implied in Christ's Humanity. His Person was therefore etherealised, His Human soul was merged in the Divine word, His Body was declared to be not of a Human mother, but a portion of Divinity changed into flesh. And all this appealed to a form of piety which dreaded such awful nearness to God, and also a form of intellectual nicety which dreaded the thought of a human person who might be liable to sin.

In either case Christianity, in the sense of salvation wrought by God in Christ, was at an end. To preserve the faith in Christ's Divinity at the cost of His true Humanity is to lose the spiritual power of Christ either as Example or Saviour. And besides, there was the plain statement of Scripture that He was made like unto His brethren in all things. It was the clear grasp of those grave consequences which impelled the second great Council to extend the definition of Nice, and

to affirm the perfect Manhood of Christ. The foundation was laid at this stage for a full-orbed Christian theology, and it is not too much to say that, in the sense of bringing the revelation of God into full light, as acts of Grace wrought for sinful humanity, these combined affirmations of Nice and Constanti-nople were "the regeneration of the Gospel."

## V.

When these affirmations had been made the mystery might have been left, as the Church has left similar mysteries, but confusion was still possible. Again began exaggeration and over-emphasis. Up till now the distinctness of Christ's Humanity and His Divinity had been maintained, but a new problem arose, the problem of personality. Is there a Human Christ and a Divine Christ? This was the question forced to the front by the unconscious heresy of Nestorius, who had

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failed to appreciate that Scripture predicates what is human of God and what is divine of man, that there is not a man who is son of Mary, and another Person who is Son of God. The Union of Manhood and Godhead is represented as so intimate that what is true of Christ's Personality in one aspect may be spoken of as true of the other. He is found speaking of Himself as the Son of Man which is in heaven, and St Paul speaks of the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory. There is only one solution of the apparent contradiction, and the assertion of this solution marks the third stage of the great controversy, "He is not two but one Christ."

Fifty years had passed since the last great pronouncement. Many famous teachers had adorned the Church. It was the age of Augustine, Jerome and Chrysostom, Basil and Gregory. But, as we look back on the period, the interest even of the great personalities fades away before the vital issue of the

time. The heresy of Nestorius was rightly described by St Cyril, his great antagonist, as a “wrenching up of the Incarnation from its basis,” and “a digging up of the root of our salvation.”

Thus once more it was in the interests, not of abstract speculation, but of life, that the faith of the Incarnation was asserted against an attempt which, however well-intentioned, simply put the Saviour of men “at the head of all saints.”

## VI.

But the unity of Christ’s Person still left a serious problem—a problem which to this hour presents itself for satisfactory solution on the philosophic side. What is exactly meant by the phrase “two distinct natures” in one person? This is a question which has again risen into prominence in our own day, and it is possible that renewed study may result in a restatement which, while

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preserving the essential truth, will relieve the definition of possible misunderstandings. The word “nature,” and even more the Greek equivalent, has physical associations which are apt to be misleading. It also suggests an inherited or created something, and is thus so far inapplicable to the Divine Christ. Indeed the term was “a catchword of the time with contending parties.” And it has to be remembered that it means (as Dr Dykes has pointed out) one thing when we speak of Jesus in His human nature, and a different thing in His Divine Nature, because this is to transfer it to “a pure and self-existent spirit.”

It has been truly said that this fourth stage of the discussion marks the high-water mark of Confessional Christology. Whatever defects remain in the terminology and whatever restatements await us there is no dubiety as to the truth meant to be safeguarded. It is important, however, to observe what this

last stage involved. The Church had affirmed the true Divinity, the true Humanity, and the Unity of Christ's Person. There remained the question of two distinct natures. Reaction had once more set in. Since it had been attempted to separate the human nature from the Divine, it was now attempted to protect the Unity of His Person by merging the Manhood in the Godhead. But once more this was to imperil the reality of our Lord's Incarnation, and to destroy the value of His example, the power of His atonement, and the meaning of His gift of a new life.

To meet this new difficulty, appeal was made to the portrait of Christ in the Gospels. And the series of contrasts presented here was set forth in terse and dramatic form—that series of contrasts which forms the perpetual challenge to faith. I quote them in the eloquent words of Leo, whose strenuous efforts were mainly instrumental in securing this historic definition.

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"As a man He is tempted of Satan; as God He is ministered to by the angels. To hunger, to thirst, to be weary, to sleep—this is evidently of the man; but to feed the five thousand with the five loaves, to give the Samaritan woman the living water, to walk upon the sea, to subdue the tossing waves—this without controversy is of the God. To omit many examples, it belongs not to the same nature to lament with pitiful feeling the dead friend, and removing the stone which had hid him four days in the grave; to wake him to life again at the command of His voice—or to hang upon the Cross and to make all the elements tremble, turning day into night—or to be pierced with nails and to open the gates of Paradise—or to say, 'I and the Father are one,' and 'the Father is greater than I.'"

In 451, a century and a quarter after the Arian troubles, the Church accepted this statement of the faith of the Incarnation, which,

summarising all that preceded, adds characteristics of its own, leaving the essential truth of the Incarnation indubitable, but leaving also elements of incompleteness. Perhaps it is historically accurate to say that the definition is not presented as a solution: "it tried to formulate only the core of truth, which is the minimum that faith feels it necessary to say, on the mystery of the Incarnate Person." It remains, however, as the summary of that long intellectual and spiritual effort which engaged the greatest minds of the age, and is a testimony to the depth of their faith in the mystery of the Incarnation which, they were first to acknowledge, no efforts of theirs could completely explain. It is an acknowledgment which held for centuries unchallenged, and still in its main features commands the fealty of the whole Church of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead, and the same perfect in Manhood, truly God and truly Man, the same of a reasonable soul, and a

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body consubstantial with the Father as to the Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us as to the Manhood, in all things like unto us apart from sin: who was begotten of the Father before ages as to the Godhead, but at the end of days, the selfsame for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin, the Mother of God, as to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only - begotten, acknowledged as in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation."

It has been said of this comprehensive definition that the few points laid down, valuable as they are to faith, offer us nothing better than the hard and meagre outlines of a doctrine. But this is hardly fair to the conditions under which the definition was produced, nor indeed quite accurate in fact. There was a plain danger of drifting into a pantheistic conception, in order to cover the difficulty of the distinction between manhood and Godhead.

That danger may well be appreciated by us, for it is very much in evidence through the confusion of the Immanence and Transcendence of God. While, therefore, the Definition is a meagre outline—if you will—it certainly served the purpose of preserving the figure of the historical Christ of the Gospels from being lost in mystic speculation, and securing by the assertion of His consubstantiality with us “the necessary conditions of a true redemption—the permanence and perfection of Christ’s manhood, the reality of His brotherhood with men in suffering and temptation, the fulfilment of man’s ideal destiny in His Person.”

Yet it is natural to suppose that in the strenuous endeavours to maintain those necessary distinctions, men’s thoughts had been distracted from the Living Christ, and the definition is certainly weak on the moral side. It hoists its “danger flags,” and sets forth its logical distinctions, and so far it is complete. But it is defective in ethical appeal, and it

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rests on power more than on grace. Yet when rightly understood and freed from misleading terms, there is no doubt of its real intention, for “it comes to this, that when we ascribe what we call divine nature to our Lord, we affirm that the Eternal Son, after His Incarnation, retains His divine power to renew, and quicken, and glorify the human nature which He has assumed. Thenceforward all the resources of the Deity are at the service of our race itself for saving ends: for purposes not of redemption only, but of vivification as well, and purification and glorification.”

## VII.

To theologians and scholars accustomed to deal with the history and development of doctrine, the facts here briefly outlined possess an intellectual interest, which does not obscure their spiritual importance. The Church as a whole has spoken in them as nowhere else. To

ordinary Christian people they are a reminder that the faith of the Church in the Incarnation of our Lord is not a treasure which has been obtained or preserved without toil and conflict. If in the present day the same truth is brought home to us, it may steady our minds to remember that as each new phase of the mystery has tested faith in the past, so may it be once more. Complaint has sometimes been made of the meagreness of the result in the brief statements of the Creed. But the wisdom and caution of Christian thinkers have probably never been better exemplified. The reserve which characterises even the fullest of these early statements is one of the main reasons for the prominence which they have enjoyed.

Content with her implicit faith, the Church seems to have resisted, even to the utmost verge of toleration, any attempt to explain what was felt and acknowledged as a mystery. But coming into contact with the philosophies

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of the day, and, being forced to answer questions, or see the faith overturned, she steadily repelled, one by one, the objections and denials with which the central truth of the divinity was met. Thus after four centuries of contention she still retained intact the essential truth, enshrining it in language which, however imperfect, conserves the great reality of a Saviour of men, in whom we may trust, a Moral Example whom we may follow, a Judge to whose righteous and merciful judgment we may look, — the one Being whom men may love and obey with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength.

Thus the implicit faith of the Church in a Divine Redeemer was only explicitly declared, in so far as it affected the relation of the Eternal Son to the Eternal Father. It remained for future generations of Christian thinkers, in the long quest which still proceeds, to relate the Divine Christ to the

facts of His Incarnate Life, and to exhibit Him as the Revealer of the Father and the Redeemer of Man.

Meanwhile the great reality treasured by the faith of the Church remained hidden under the forms of the Creed never quite reduced to a unity of thought.

“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail the Incarnate Deity !  
Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.”

“After all,” says Dr Bright, “if Christ is believed in as one, yet as both truly God and truly man—however little we can comprehend the relation thus created—that belief is all that the Chalcedonian terminology implies: to hold it is to be at one with the Fourth Council”—and, we may add, with the Historic Formulation of the Faith.



## THE FAITH IN HISTORY.



## IV.

### THE FAITH IN HISTORY.

#### I.

THE historic formulation of the faith culminated, as we saw, in 451, at the Fourth Great Council of the Church, which gathered into one comprehensive statement, along with distinctive contributions of its own, the decisions of preceding Councils. This statement, while embodying new phraseology not incapable of being misunderstood, was absolutely clear as to the essential position of the Church. She refused to give up the true divinity of Christ; she refused to give up His true Humanity; she maintained the unity of His Person; and declined to accept any position which would merge

His Divinity and Humanity. To the faith of the Church there was one Christ truly and distinctly divine, truly and distinctly human. There was still left that which remains as the inevitable burden of faith — to explain this intimate and continual intermixture of the divine and human in Christ; but notwithstanding difficulties in terminology, which still call for closer scrutiny, the great landmarks of the faith were marked out in this historic formulation with such clearness as to justify the position which it has so long occupied as an expression of the mind and consciousness of the Church. When the Church's faith had been declared in such a manner as to safeguard the truth of His Humanity as well as of His Divinity, it entered upon a career which, in spite of renewed controversy and not infrequent perplexity, continued till within recent times, showing no serious modifications.

Of this chequered career it remains to speak, exhibiting as far as possible the faith in history.

And this for clear practical reasons. At a time when this age-long possession of the Church seems to some to be slipping from under our feet, how shall we best exhibit its place and power, except by showing how perils as great if not even greater have often beset it? Indeed the supreme value of historical retrospect lies in the illustration it continually gives of the fact that modern difficulties are often only the re-appearance of old controversies in a slightly modified form. Consequently, as Lightfoot once said, "a draught of history is the best tonic for doubting souls."

I have said that the faith as historically formulated has maintained itself practically unmodified till within recent times. Now this is due to the fact that the Church has always been more sure of what she wanted to say than of how to say it, more sure of the essential truth of the unity of God and man in Christ, than of any definition or description she has been able to give of the mystery. The

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faith is one thing, the formulation of the faith quite another. The first involves spiritual experience of the facts, the second intellectual co-ordination. The Church had not in fact offered a solution of the problem inherent in her faith in Christ. On the contrary, she had contented herself with a statement of both sides as presented in Scripture, and left the explanation practically untouched. Nor is this exceptional, for the same wisdom and reserve appear everywhere. Indeed this has been characteristic of the Church in the expression and development of doctrine, and is probably inevitable. When it has been departed from, the consequences have been serious and far-reaching, very remarkably, for example, in the history of sacramental doctrine. For a thousand years the Church had dealt with the Eucharist, practically as she had dealt with such doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the sovereignty of God. She had simply set down both sides of the truth, affirming their

absolute unity:—God is three in one, and one in three; Christ is God and man; God is Sovereign, man is free. So with the sacrament of the Supper she had in effect been content to say “This is the Bread,” “This is the Cup,” “This is the Body,” “This is the Blood.” At length, under the stress of debate and with a mistaken sense of reverence, she permitted herself to be precipitated into a doctrine which is no explanation of the two sides of the ordinance, is destructive of the very nature of a sacrament, and sacrifices the full-orbed truth apprehended by faith to a false and one-sided Unity.

A better and truer instinct has so far prevailed in the history of the Church’s faith in Christ. From the first she has resisted any attempt to reach a short cut to the solution by eliminating one half of the problem; and this position she has on the whole steadfastly maintained. Equally rigid in resisting humanitarian and Trinitarian exaggerations, she

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has left the problem of the union of the divine and human where it was left in 451. The mystery of the union is still with us, and no theory has yet emerged which covers every phase of the difficulty. But as the faith is ultimately trust in a Person, rather than assent to a proposition, this is no barrier to the Church's grasp of the essential truth. It has been clear through all history that "the instinct of Christianity dates before its logic"; it is equally clear, however, that the search for logical confirmation of the instinct has never ceased, and never will till faith passes into sight.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the great question should continue, even after the definition of Chalcedon, to agitate the Church. Indeed though the West, for the time being, seemed perfectly satisfied, "the Greek world," as we are told, "went on in its task of thinking out the problem" as though nothing had been said at Chalcedon. The spirit of

speculation could not rest. It insisted upon an explanation of the mystery “How is He both God and Man”; and the intellectual energy which had hitherto inspired successive rejected theories continued to show itself. Indeed, it may almost be said that heresy became synonymous with attempts to explain, and orthodoxy with “the negation of all possible theory on the subject of Christ’s Person.” Yet the demand for explanation could not be absolutely repressed: and certainly the Church itself would have been vastly poorer in thought, and weaker in the living spirit of devotion, had stern repression checked the flow of legitimate inquiry. Whatever may have been their strict logical consequences, no theory except, perhaps, Arianism was conceived in opposition to the truth of the Incarnation. Each was an attempt, honest so far as it went, to explain the mystery of the faith. Each had failed to command the assent of the Church; but

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the special difficulty which each had emphasised was still present to thought. However, the strength of the Church lay, as always, in her continued refusal to reach simplicity, by sacrificing any element of truth.

One by one these rejected phases of thought began to reappear, threatening to destroy the unity of the Church's faith, and certainly discrediting her in the eyes of the world. It is indeed a dreary and distressful story to those who forget that, as in the struggle for national and individual liberty, so in the long intellectual warfare of the faith the

“Battle once begun,

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Though baffled oft, will yet be won.”

The Church had weathered storms from every side. She had still to encounter varied winds of doctrine. Meanwhile, however, the passion evoked by the decision of the great Council bore bitter fruit. Fanaticism joined hands with scholarship to stir the

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embers of controversy, which had only smouldered and were still dangerous. All over the East discontent was ripe, for the decision had come upon men as an authoritative denial of the Unity of Christ, which seemed impossible if He were held to have two distinct natures.

When, therefore, the doctrine that Christ had only one nature was again revived, it met with a multitude of adherents. This new form of an old heresy spoke of Christ's nature as human and divine, but still one though composite, His human nature being only a kind of accident of the divine. It was thus simply another attempt after an elusive unity; and it apparently turned upon a fallacy which has haunted Christian thought, though it is very obvious when simply stated. Christian theology nowhere teaches that God became incarnate, but the Son of God. When, therefore, the new party raised the cry "God was crucified for us," they were speaking only

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a half truth. Honouring the Lord as God, they were ignoring Him as Man. Yet there was an element of religious attraction in this displacement of the faith which is always fascinating to piety; and, indeed, it contains, when rightly understood, a precious truth to which the Church has ever clung.

But the religious interest of the movement was almost submerged under a flood of popular passion and violence. Political antagonisms and court intrigue combined to confuse the issues. A temporary schism between East and West increased the confusion. And the doctrine itself amid conflicting advocates began to break up. It could neither explain the meaning of the "nature" and "person" of which it spoke: nor could it satisfy the religious instinct which craves not only for God in us, as Christ is said to be; but that we should be in God, as through Christ we may be. Some spoke of "God crucified"; others tended to

speak of "three Gods"; by some the body of Christ was regarded as corruptible, by others as sharing the incorruptibility of the Word; some denied all distinction between manhood and Godhead in Christ; others drifted into trifling side issues. Thus the first serious attempt, after the historic formulation, to break the reserve and balance of the Church's faith lost dignity and force. But there was substance and weight in its main purpose, though it failed in the effort to give to it convincing expression. For its aim was to preserve the Church's faith in the one Christ, though the Union which it affirmed involved the absorption of one nature into the other, and left an impossibility for thought, a *tertium quid*, neither truly human nor truly divine.

Now, when this somewhat crude enterprise of thought had at length plainly failed, the field was still held by a similar but more subtle theory, the last effort of the Eastern

Church before it sank “exhausted into a stereotyped orthodoxy incapable of further change.” This was the doctrine that Christ had only one will—a theory well described as “the ethical complement” of the theory of one nature. For, indeed, in its search for unity it presses nearer to the core of the problem of Christ. Again the centre of interest is the vital unity of His Person. Again, also, political considerations block the path of theological inquiry. External unity must at all cost be maintained. Hence the new theory is met by an attempt at compromise. To obviate the difficulty it is suggested that our Lord, “though possessed of two natures, yet had only one will” and activity—one divine-human activity or operation. Various phases of this proposal appeared. Some merged the whole activity of Christ in the Godhead: others recognised “two operations” but one operator: others, allowing two wills in independent operation,

regarded the result as a single composite will. No form of the compromise was found acceptable. Once more, according to the consistent and steadfast practice of the Church, compromise was rejected. It was seen that to deny Christ's human will is to deny His true Humanity — to turn back on His plain words, "I seek not mine own will, but His that sent me"; "Not my will but Thine be done." Thus the central thought of the faith was still preserved, that Christ had assumed our nature in all its completeness, "that He might renew it after the image of God." One illuminative principle comes down to us from the somewhat confused discussion. It is the principle already mentioned, on which it had been hoped that contending parties might find common ground — this, namely, that every activity of Christ is due to one divine-human operation. In every word it is Christ, God and Man, Who speaks; in every action it is Christ, God and Man, Who

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acts. Though the form in which this principle was urged upon the Church was definitely rejected, the truth after which it is obviously searching was taken up consciously into the Church's faith. Though the two wills exist, they act harmoniously in the one Person of Christ. Each takes its part according to its own proper character. By His Divine Will, for example, He multiplies the loaves : by His Human Will He breaks the bread : the whole is one act of Him who wills and acts as man and as God.

Thus, once more, against the theory of one will the Church opposed her settled conviction of one Person. Yet it only succeeded in doing so by exhibiting the Deity in Christ as practically predominant over the humanity, and therefore left a legacy of uncertainty and incompleteness which is a source of intellectual trouble to this hour. Was Christ's Human will subject to His Divine will, and therefore not really free? Is it

sufficient for thought to lay alongside the series of recorded acts of Christ, attributing the one group to His Divinity and the other to His Humanity? Or must we not look to that deeper thought of Christ's Person, in which we realise that "He as a man subjected humanity in Himself, and through Himself to God the Father, thus setting us an example of a perfect kind that we also may voluntarily submit ourselves"? It is surely along such lines of thought, which foremost defenders of the Church's position had already indicated, that a true view must be sought. His true humanity implies that as man he was essentially a voluntary being, that His human will is not merely determined by the Divine, but that the whole gracious activity of Christ for us men, and for our salvation, was as really human as it was really divine. The Unity of the Person, that most precious element in the Church's faith, must not be preserved at the cost of the humanity.

Thus at the close of three centuries, the long-continued movement of the Church's thought still presents the essential truth affirmed at Chalcedon. Yet "not a complete result," but still "a problem," "that God Himself lived and walked among us a man among men."

## II.

From that time up to the present age, the faith of the Church in the Unity of Christ's Person has only once been seriously assailed. And there is no reason to doubt that even in this case the movement began in perfect loyalty to truth. Christianity had come into contact with Mahomedanism, and had found it necessary to meet the special objections of the followers of that militant creed with its hard conception of the Unity of God. The Mahomedan conquest of Spain was effected

from 711 to 714, and it would seem that the clergy made sincere though futile efforts to convert their conquerors. "God cannot have children," said the Koran; "far from His Glory be that blasphemy." At any rate, it is significant that the new movement began among the Saracens of Spain. It was a well-intentioned attempt to solve the problem of the relation of the one Person of Christ to His two natures; and for this purpose, it turned aside from the abstract terms to the thought of His Sonship. It drew a distinction in which there is truth and scriptural value covered by the term Adoption. Christ is by nature Son of God as Divine, as Human He is Son of God only by adoption. His was a twofold Sonship. "Both as God and as Man our Lord is Son of God." The Son of Man had in short two births—a natural birth by the Virgin, and a spiritual birth by adoption and grace, begun in Baptism, completed in

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the Resurrection. “According to His Divine nature He was the only Begotten; and according to His Human Nature the first Begotten.”

Now, however well intentioned this movement undoubtedly was, it seemed to involve two Personalities, and therefore, in spite of the elements of truth underlying it, the Church would have none of it.

It will thus be seen that, on the verge of the Middle Ages, the faith of the Church in the Person of Christ, having passed through many phases of controversy, and having become more and more conscious (so to speak) of the dangers to which it was exposed, had nevertheless so far succeeded in maintaining itself against defections on the one side or the other. And we are left with the conviction that, behind all intellectual effort to define and explain, there was a kind of spiritual force, what has been well called an instinctive and irrepressible faith, that defies heresy, and

holds a straight course towards the essential truth.

The time had now come, however, when this temper of faith was to meet with a difficult but in a sense no less searching test. It was called to the bar of reason and asked to make good its claims. Yet the call was more formal than real. For the authority of the Church had already narrowed the limits of speculation. Accordingly, there is a certain air of unreality in much of the discussion, though in the main it is characterised by an absorbing interest in the great central question of the Person of our Lord.

Centuries of debate had still left His Humanity so manifestly subordinate to His Divinity that continued inquiry was inevitable. It was not sufficient to repress and affirm. There was required for reverent thought, as indeed there still is, a more thorough application of the principle of mutual permeation — that necessary conception by which we may realise

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that "the human nature penetrated and pervaded the Divine in all those moral and religious departments in which the two natures are akin,"—a principle very clear when theoretically stated, but very difficult practically to maintain, because in actual result it is the human nature alone which is affected, through being lifted into the conditions of the divine life.

Is it then surprising that the most distinctive contribution of early Mediævalism should be a theory of the Person of Christ, in which the difference between the divine and the human in Christ (or indeed between God and Man) almost disappears? Such, undoubtedly, is the underlying thought of the great Western Theologian, John Scotus Erigena, at the close of the ninth century, who in substance and spirit anticipated the modern phase of pantheism, with which we are now familiar. For him man has a mind like that of God, all pervading and all em-

bracing. But the universe of which Man is a part must dissolve into nothing apart from Him who is its life. Hence Christ is (so to speak) the principle of life to the Universe, and the incarnation is the assumption of a complete human nature by Deity itself. The Entrance of Christ into humanity removes the difference, and in Him Humanity becomes Deity. As a historical person, Christ practically vanishes, and the words which describe His earthly experiences cease to have any real meaning.

Thus a thousand years before the appearance of the modern ideal philosophy, we see the Church's faith in the Person of Christ sublimated into a mystical conception, in which the reality of His human experience and the reality of His divine power are equally lost in the vagueness of speculation. For those who were able to accept this mystical teaching, it bore fruits in forms of esctatic piety, it taught them to regard every believer as God's truly

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begotten Son, and to believe that whatever the sacred Scripture says concerning Christ is absolutely true of every good man. So it worked itself out in rapturous experiences of spiritual exaltation. Even when its more pronounced pantheism was discarded, it affected the scholastic mystics with its oriental flavour of personal absorption. Their aim was to lose themselves in the mysterious depth of Christ's impersonal humanity. They plunged into an abyss of ecstatic enjoyment where the distinction between God and Man was obliterated, and where already under earthly conditions they "in the ocean of His love" had seemed to "lose themselves in heaven above."

From such mystical aspirations much practical piety unquestionably flowed, but it would be vain to expect clear or helpful guidance in the great intellectual and spiritual problem of Christ's Person. To the thought of Christendom this vein of teaching was only misleading. Even when they accepted the language of the

historic creeds, they gave to them a meaning of their own, robbing them of objective reality; the actual Christ was lost in the Christ of inward experience, and a foundation was laid for those forms of thought which have sought to divorce the Christ of History from the Christ of the Church's faith.

Meanwhile there had risen into clearer view an aspect of Christ's Person which gave greater depth and seriousness to the controversy. All along, indeed, to the minds of the great teachers of the Church, the predominant interest had been not merely intellectual satisfaction, but the satisfaction of moral and religious need. The possibility of moral restoration for the human soul alone gives life and meaning to this age-long argument around the Person of Christ. It is this deep human interest which throbs in passionate heart-beats through the pages of Athanasius, and which glows with living fire, even as we read it in the cold print to-day.

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A living soul meets us through the long interval of bygone centuries, and we recognise in his stirring words the profound and unerring instinct which has never deserted the Church. "My Saviour," says this master of the sacred science—"My Saviour must be the great God who made heaven and earth! and He must unite the human and divine nature which He possesses in a union which for me is a mystery to be believed, but which my intelligence can never explain or penetrate." It may be that, amid the subtleties of later Christian thought, this strong personal interest in the living Saviour sometimes suffers eclipse, but it is never entirely lost, and when at length we reach the time of the Reformation, it breaks into renewed prominence, claiming with imperious insistence the attention of all thinking men.

But even in the period immediately preceding there had been an unconscious

preparation for this more serious and practical treatment. Sophistries and academic side-issues were no doubt abundant. The Master of Sentences resolved the Incarnation into a mere appearance, involving no real assumption of human nature, and no mediatorial power for salvation, but only supplying teaching and example. On the other hand, the question was raised whether apart from sin Christ would have come. In this deep thought there is certainly a constant fascination for the questioning mind. To see in Christ's manhood an end predestined, apart from human sin, to be the climax of creation, is to see a possible solution of many problems to which modern thought has given special acuteness. But the question is so purely speculative as to be almost futile, and we may well rest content with the sane judgment of Thomas Aquinas, who sees no reason why God might not in any event have become incarnate, but deems it more

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fitting that according to the Scriptural account we should speak of the Incarnation as a remedy for sin. The idea will always, however, retain its spiritual attractiveness and power, for the faith of the Church implies that we see in the Incarnation not only the work of infinite wisdom and love, but that which is wider than both—"we behold the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Evidently then the deep moral issues involved in the question were coming anew to the front. As of old, it is the sense of ethical necessity as well as of logical fitness that prompts the search for clearness of definition.

### III.

In the discussions of the Reformation period this is specially manifest. New forces more intimate and experimental came into play. The relation of the faith to personal

piety was a vital factor. The religious sense quickened and revived theological thought. Like Athanasius and Augustine, Luther came to the intellectual grasp of truth through spiritual experience. His entire teaching centres in Christ, but he reaches Christ through an act of faith, "in a union not of intellect but of heart." And this is indeed the great contribution of the Reformation to the Church's faith in the Person of Christ. Otherwise the Reformers accepted without hesitation the ancient Creeds. With renewed vigour they asserted the essential truth for which testimony had been borne with remarkable consistency at every crisis in the Church's history. It seemed indeed at this supreme crisis as if amid the crash of authority and the uprooting of age-worn convictions deeply and widely cherished, a special firmness of grip marked men's hold of the essential faith of the one Person of Christ, the Lord and Redeemer of men. At

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the core of Luther's message is “the living faith in God, who for Christ's sake and in Christ proclaims to the guilty soul, I am thy salvation ; at the core of Calvin's teaching is the single all-embracing thought of Christ, God, and Man, ‘Christus, Deus, et Homo’;” at the core of every reformed confession is the confident conviction of a living faith in one Christ, very God and very Man. Throughout Christendom, notwithstanding upheavals hitherto unheard of, this central faith remained. The Church in all its sections stood as of yore, holding unbroken the essential catholic faith of the Person of Christ. And in this impressive unity Scotland from the beginning took an honourable place. The first Scottish Confession of 1560 fully adopts the doctrine which had been definitely settled by the early Councils—“Christ Jesus, very God and very Man, with two distinct natures, the divine and the human, in one Person.”

It would appear then that while the Church in the sixteenth century had been shaken to its foundation, the foundation itself, the faith in Christ, continued in all essentials as before. Indeed it received an added strength and a richer meaning. The subtleness of scholastic thought had shown the fatal facility with which theological inquiry may be separated from personal religion. It had scarcely attempted to take into account the strong currents of spiritual devotion to Christ which ran through the later mediæval period, and often put to shame the barrenness of contemporary dialectics. As one reads the history of the Church, the most striking feature (remarkable as it is) is not this care for intellectual precision steadfastly maintained, but rather a deepening sense of Christ's moral supremacy and a growing devotion to His Person as the natural fruit of faith. This is seen in the passionate expression of many of the mediæval hymns,

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which show how deeply the Church's faith had affected her life and hope. Yet the intensity of her devotional fervour cannot be separated from the clearness and decision with which she had repelled all attempts, however plausible, to detract by a single iota from the reality of His divine claim or the simplicity of His human character. Whatever difficulties remained for logic, the essential truth had been so guarded that it remained as a real possession within the inmost sanctuary of the Church's life. It bridged all divisions; it overflowed all differences. The aim of the Christian worshipper, as of the Christian thinker, was to honour Christ, to exalt His name, and vindicate His supremacy in thought, and over the Church.

Now with the new stirring of men's hearts in the sixteenth century came a revival of spiritual interest, and the living experience of Christian souls threw fresh light on the Church's faith. Men seemed to come nearer

to Christ, and therefore nearer to God. It was thus that Luther saw in the Person of Christ more than a mere abstract doctrine. His experience of redemption revealed to him the Redeemer. Because Christ redeems He is the Redeemer. Redemption and Godhead were inseparably bound together. By the force of personal need Luther was driven back behind the intricate barriers of the scholastic theology, to find in living contact with Christ the true secret of the Church's life, and to bring it once more into vital relation with the religious life of men. There indeed the faith had had its origin. It began in experience, and from experience it can never safely or justly be divorced. It was the distinction of Luther, and of the leading Reformers, to achieve this great gain, and to set the divine work of Christ at the centre of Christian thought. "No one can really know God save through the Christ of History." "There is room for no other vision

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of God than that which Christ gives us." Such, truly, is "the master thought of Reformation doctrine."

#### IV.

Thus, then, after more than a thousand years, we find the Church's faith in the Person of Christ substantially the same and expressed in the same terms. But a fuller and richer meaning had entered in. Experience had claimed its rightful place in moulding thought. With no verbal displacement there was deeper moral appreciation. A mere abstract contemplation of His divinity and humanity apart was felt to be impossible. "When we see Jesus, we perceive God and Man really and intimately united." "In Jesus we see God appearing in history and addressing man." It is no longer only a question of vital religion, and the Person of Christ is set forth as the source of spiritual

life to the individual, as the means of direct communion with God, as the revealer of the Father, as the sole means of grace, through faith and penitence, by word, sacrament, and prayer.

## V.

Nevertheless, even from this time of earnest moral and intellectual struggle, a legacy of difficulty and confusion was left. A great question was forced to the front, but received no satisfactory solution. This was the mysterious question of the self-emptying of Christ, again so prominent in our day. The immediate cause for the emergence of the problem was the doctrine of transubstantiation. This had been a main point of difficulty with the Reformation movement. Escape from its entangling assumptions was sought in two directions. The Lutherans chose the middle path of consubstantiation, the reformed a more spiritual conception of sacramental union

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with Christ. The middle way seemed to imply that Christ's Body must be everywhere present. The attribute of omnipresence, which was essentially an attribute of the divine, was transferred to the human nature, and it was maintained that wherever the Word was, there was the flesh, present in a union "essential, personal, and abiding."

Now it is, and always has been, a principle of the faith, that what can be affirmed of either nature may be affirmed of the one Christ. Thus we may rightly say "Christ is Eternal," and also "Christ has died." Thus also we may rightly say that God is Redeemer, because Christ is God, or that the Son of Man is Redeemer, because Christ is the Son of Man. But to affirm that the divine nature absolutely conveyed to the human nature its own properties, even when the statement is qualified by the assumption of a special preparation of Christ's Human nature, is to destroy the true humanity of

Christ, and to leave a problem more intricate and unintelligible than that which Scripture presents. Hence the theology of Lutheranism encountered the rocks which have always risen in the path of speculation, and though it tried to avoid them by maintaining that while Christ in His human nature possessed divine powers He either veiled their presence or withheld their use, it found escape neither in the one direction nor the other. It was reserved for the Reformed Theology to emphasise once more the distinction of the two natures—to maintain the reality of the divine condescension, but to affirm the continuous reality of Christ's Humanity.

Once more the shifting of emphasis produced a similar result. In the effort to do justice to the two sides of His Being there was danger of losing the one Christ. The danger was avoided not so much by intellectual consistency as by depth of reverence. The discussions of the time left the seeds of future

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trouble, but the common centre of the Church's faith remained.

One great result certainly began gradually to appear, indirectly due to the ethical seriousness added by the Reformation struggle to all reasoned thought. There seemed to be a logical contradiction between the natural attributes of God and Man; it appeared impossible to conceive of the divine and the human in one Person; impossible to think consistently of Christ as at one and the same time all powerful and limited in power, all knowing and limited in knowledge, everywhere present, only in one place. But when the great thought of a redeeming purpose arose behind the abstract question, when He, who had baffled human thought by the apparent complexity of a twofold consciousness, yet dominated mind and conscience and heart by the clearness of His revelation of God—when God, through Christ, was seen and felt to be something more than mere

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mechanical infinity, or power, or abstract being—when in the infinitude of His Being there is recognised the ultimate principle of love, then and then only it becomes possible to realise how, between the finite and the infinite, between the human and the divine, there can be a real and living link. “It is only when we read the Glory of God in the face of Christ, and realise that the central and essential attributes of God are love, grace, compassion for human frailty and need, that we can recognise the Divine and the Human as one, and acknowledge in Christ the revelation of the Divine, the Word of God Incarnate.”

## VI.

This noble view was one result of the seriousness of Reformation thought, but it made way slowly. Indeed, the zeal of orthodoxy seemed to water the seeds of heresy. The independence of the Divine and

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human was seized upon to show that inter-communion was impossible, and out of this thought, pushed to its extreme, modern Unitarianism arose. Christ was still left with something of the Supernatural. He was still the Son of the Virgin, still sinless and specially endowed, but still, despite His uniqueness, truly and only man. Yet even in this wide departure from traditional convictions, elements appear, destined to react with wholesome vigour on the faith of the Church. The way was being prepared for a better understanding and a more reverent appreciation of the historical portrait of Christ. There has dawned upon the horizon of human thought a view of His holy humanity, which seems to clothe the bare speculations of the past with radiant beauty. It has come to be felt that the idea of humanity revealed and embodied in Christ does not require us to separate between it and God, who is the God and Father of our Spirits.

Thus the emphatic assertion of Christ's Humanity, intended as a denial of His Divine claims, has become the fruitful source of impulse, and has led to unexpected results. We have come round to a new position, but it is dominated by the thought for which the Church has always contended, Christ's true Humanity, as fitted in a deeper sense perhaps than she formerly realised, to be the medium of the divine.

## VII.

Thus the problem which has never left the Church at rest meets us at the beginning of our own age, and is profoundly affected by the new conditions of thought, especially by two important influences—the speculative advances of modern philosophy and the rise of historical criticism, both largely concerned with the Person of Christ. Each of these movements has been in a sense the corrective

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of the other, and between them we have the continuous testimony of experience, which now, as always, draws inspiration from the deep well of faith. Three results have consequently followed. Philosophy with its glorification of the ideal Christ has destroyed the crude theories which defend the reality of Christ's Humanity. Criticism has compelled renewed study of the actual portrait of Christ in the Gospels. Experience brings its testimony to His living power. The faith of the Church is seen to be rational and consistent, at variance with no principle of human or of divine nature. Thus with renewed and reverent study of the facts of Christ's life, with deeper appreciation of the value of spiritual experience as a necessary means of interpretation, and with a clearer grasp of the Incarnation, we find ourselves justified, even at the close of this long battle, in looking forward with confidence to the future, and in cherishing the conviction that the

faith, which in history has been so continuously tested, will still survive even intellectual failure and disappointment; will take to itself a richer and fuller content, and will move forward to embody more and more the highest ideals and hopes of men, in its unwavering acceptance of Him our Leader, our Master and our Guide, Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Son of Man.



INHERENT AND RECURRENT  
DIFFICULTIES.



## V.

### INHERENT AND RECURRENT DIFFICULTIES.

#### I.

I HAVE endeavoured to deal with the historic formulation of the faith, and to show how by that formulation the essential elements of the faith have been so far maintained. It has been abundantly evident however that, at every stage of her career, the Church has encountered serious difficulties in preserving her intellectual integrity and in adjusting the expression of her faith, in view of these difficulties, some of them inherent in the very fact of Christ's Person, and others recurring under varying forms with each new age of inquiry.

One thing has never been in doubt, what the

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Church really wanted to say as to Christ, and she has never failed (if not satisfactorily to express it) at least to safeguard the essential faith. Through the controversies of nearly two thousand years the faith has held its own, and the Church has still pursued the task, to which every age brings a new summons, so to express its full content as to bring it into right relation with all truth. If then the Church is being moved to-day in the direction of a restatement of her central position, it is not therefore to be supposed that this restatement, should it come, will involve any departure from the essential truth as faith has continuously recognised it.

Now when we speak of "inherent and recurrent difficulties," it will be seen that to deal fitly with any of these would demand a treatise in itself; and I must therefore restrict myself to one or two central questions which are of special importance and indeed of vital interest.

I propose, therefore, to call attention to two

questions, one of a historical and the other of a psychological nature, which have bulked largely in recent discussions of the Church's faith in Christ. The first of these is the question of the Virgin Birth of Christ; and the second, the question of the self-emptying of Christ, to which St Paul makes reference in the Epistle to the Philippians. This can only be done in a general and summary way.

## II.

Before going on to these themes, let me point out two difficulties of a general kind which have hampered and will always hamper the Church in her great task of defining her faith in Christ.

1. The first is the poverty of human language. What Rousseau said of definitions is singularly apt—that they would be good were they not necessarily in words. The faith of the Church is one thing, the definition of the

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faith quite another; because the first implies spiritual experience of the facts, and the second intellectual co-ordination of the facts. No doubt the faith has owed much to precision of terms, but terminology at the best is fluid and elusive. Words change their meaning, and terms, quite definite in one language, cannot always be translated with precision into another.

Again, also, the faith has rarely ever been always and everywhere and by all apprehended exactly and precisely, under the very terms of the current definition. So sound a theologian and so orthodox a Churchman as St Hilary seems to have been unacquainted with the Nicene Creed till quite twenty years after the Council which had promulgated it. "We define Creeds," he says, "by the year or the month, and then we repent of our definitions, and repenting afresh we defend them, and then again we anathematise those we have defended." And yet Hilary was justly called the Athan-

asius of the West, with a surer grip than any man of his day of the essential faith of the Church.

Thus the statement of the faith will always be limited by the difficulty of verbal precision. It is true that in this as in other ways the Nicene theology has placed the Church under obligations which cannot be too highly estimated, but the language is not free from the possibility of serious misunderstanding. In the characteristic terms applied to Christ, such as "substance," "essence," "nature," and "person," there is a perplexing fluidity of meaning. At any rate what astronomers call the "parallax" has to be allowed for.

This difficulty has always been present to the constructive thinkers of the Church, who have been the first to acknowledge the poverty and inadequacy of human language.

2. But this difficulty of language is only a reflex of the inherent difficulty for thought. If anything be clear from historical retrospect,

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it is surely this, that while the Church has attained and resolutely maintained "a certitude that will never be lost from its true and inmost mind and heart," that in Christ is "the whole truth of God in His relation to man, and the whole truth of man in his relation to God," it has (perhaps inevitably) baffled the reflective mind of Christendom to give to that certitude such scientific expression as will embrace and explain "all the conditions and elements" which "enter into so complete and comprehensive a fact."

Now it is very obvious why the faith of the Church should present great difficulty to reasoned thought. It represents in concentrated form all the difficulties which are raised in the attempt to realise a true conception of God and a true conception of man. It involves, for instance, distinctions within the Godhead, and this, apart from all other questions, offers a very serious problem to thought. Yet both in ancient and modern times this problem has quickened faith. That

"most august creation of human speech," the name of the Holy Trinity, has an honourable history, since it was first set forth to express the mystery of the Being of God revealed in Christ. Nothing, indeed, is more honourable in Christian history than the strenuous energy of intellectual effort which has been devoted to this vital question. But to find language for that which transcends human thought is a task in which at the best we can only approximate to the truth; yet when the Church expressed her faith in Christ as the Godman, and thereby "boldly uttered the secret of the whole Bible," this deeper mystery of the Trinity was already involved. It has no direct place as a theory in Scripture, being "overheard rather than heard," but it is the necessary spiritual framework for the recorded facts. Without the essential truth of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity there is no divine Christ. Yet in itself it is for the Church a mystery from which the veil cannot be lifted till "with the vision glorious her

longing eyes are blest." So also the Church's faith in Christ rests secure "in the assurance of that which it cannot" fully understand or explain. Neither the difficulties of thought nor of language affect this central conviction, still less do they affect the Christian attitude of soul towards Christ. Human words may be too poor to compass its glorious fulness, but the faith has ever penetrated through all obstacles to Him who reveals and imparts the life of God. "Per omnia fides ad Christum penetrat."

### III.

A specific difficulty of old standing has risen into prominence in our day. I mean the supernatural birth of our Lord as declared in the Creed, "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Since Marcion in the second century, for purposes of his own, dropped the story from his version of St Luke's Gospel, it has been a stumbling-block

to many. Nor is it hard to see why—because at first sight it seems only to add to the inherent mystery of faith. Yet this consideration surely supports its credibility, for it is unlikely that such an obvious barrier would be gratuitously erected in the pathway of faith.

It must be admitted that the objections to the historic credibility of the fact are direct and not without weight. In the main these objections rest on two grounds, the question of the trustworthiness of our sources of information and the nature of the fact itself.

1. The sources of our information are the relevant portions in the early chapters of St Matthew and St Luke. These narratives as they stand are perfectly explicit, and if they can be accepted as trustworthy there is no question as to the position of the supernatural birth in the earliest tradition of the life of Christ.

In regard to St Luke, the probability is that

the source of his information would be Mary herself. There is sufficient reason to believe that she was still alive when he was preparing to "set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." The character of his narrative alike in its delicacy and its reserve is consistent with the supposition that she was the ultimate source of his knowledge, and if not directly obtained from her, it might certainly be from those to whom she had conveyed it. Even if Mary had passed away, the brethren of our Lord were still alive, and "the universal acceptance of the Gospel in the very earliest ages demonstrates that no objection to this part of the sacred narrative had been heard of as raised by them."

As to St Matthew's account, it is less detailed than that of St Luke. His authority could only have been Joseph himself, and this theory is confirmed by the fact that in the narrative three special revelations are

mentioned of which Joseph alone could have known. At any rate, it is clear that the story is told from what may rightly be called Joseph's point of view.

In both narratives there is a quite remarkable absence of extravagant features, such as those found in the apocryphal Gospels; and notwithstanding certain discrepancies, the two are absolutely in accordance as to the main fact. Now there is only one way of escape from the natural conclusion that the fact of the supernatural birth was part of the original belief of the Church, and that is to discredit the narratives as untrustworthy.

It must be said that in regard to St Luke at least the attempt has met with indifferent success. His reliableness as a trustworthy historian never stood at a higher point than it does at the present moment. Sir William Ramsay's vindication of his accuracy is nothing short of triumphant. There is absolutely no reason to doubt his reliability in the narrative

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of his first two chapters, which (apart from the character of the event recorded) would not equally apply to those portions of the third Gospel and the Acts which are unquestionably accepted. It may be well, however, to state the considerations which are given for holding the contrary opinion.

It is said that the narratives are inconsistent with the genealogies, which imply that Jesus was the Son of Joseph, that the rest of the Gospels are in no way affected by omitting these sections, that His mother and brethren show no sign of regarding His birth as differing from the ordinary, that the earliest statement of the Gospel began with John's Baptism and ended with the Resurrection of Jesus, taking no account of His Birth or Childhood, that St Paul seems to have been unaware of it, for he makes no reference, that the second and fourth Gospels are silent, that pre-existence and miraculous conception are inconsistent, and are not reported by the

same writers,—in short, it is bluntly declared that the belief in the supernatural birth rests entirely on a misunderstood text.

But to most of these allegations a direct denial can be offered. No sufficient reason has been shown for dropping the narratives; no argument can be based on the silence of Mark and John; St Paul dealt with the principles, not the facts of Christ's life; the centre of His testimony was the resurrection, and Christ's “superhuman Birth would be received without hesitation”; his characteristic doctrine of the second Adam as the new Head of Humanity is peculiarly in harmony with the truth of the Virgin Birth: “only by means of it do we secure in Jesus Christ not a mere individual in the race, but a true representative of the race.”

Apart from the nature of the fact recorded, there is no valid ground for rejecting the narratives which record the Virgin Birth.

## 2. Objection on the ground of the miraculous

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nature of the fact must be regarded from one point of view as sincere and reasonable. It is plain that if the assertion were made regarding any ordinary man it would not be accepted. Nor is the evidence such as we possess, say, for the fact of the Resurrection ; but granted that Jesus rose from the dead, the likelihood of His birth being extraordinary is certainly greatly strengthened. It is surely sufficient to remove all theoretical difficulty as to his entrance into human life, if we are able to accept the truth as to the miraculous manner in which He left it.

The general question of the Miraculous is too far-reaching to discuss here, but it may be broadly stated that any entrance of God upon earth, such as the Church's faith in Christ implies, would be no less miraculous than the particular form it took. The particular form does not increase the difficulty from a scientific point of view. So distinguished a scientist as Professor Huxley

did not regard it as possible on purely scientific grounds to reject the Virgin Birth, though on other grounds he rejected it. But he added, "the mysteries of the Church are child's-play compared with the mysteries of creation."

On the whole we may venture to say with regard to this question, that for those who reject the miraculous in any form there is no interest whatever in the discussion, for those who do not it is a question of evidence and of mortal fitness. The evidence I have already referred to. As to the question of moral fitness, nothing could be more congruous with the Church's faith, which recognised in Christ a new human experience and a new starting-point for humanity. While, therefore, the supernatural birth, as Martensen has said, is enveloped in a veil impenetrable to physical reasonings, we may well accept the conclusion that it is the only one which fully satisfies the demands of religion and theology.

## IV.

There is another difficulty which goes even closer to the core of the question as to Christ's Person than the historical question as to the mode of His Birth.

It is suggested by the apparent indications throughout the Gospels of the limitations of our Lord's Knowledge, and especially by St Paul's description of Christ's Humiliation in the phrase "He made Himself of no reputation," translated in the Revised Version "He emptied Himself."

It is possible to argue that the words are metaphorical, but whatever be their real meaning, they seem to describe an essential element in the Incarnation.

"He emptied Himself." At once from every side start forth the questions which have never ceased to agitate thought. What does this mean? How does it affect Christ's

Divine glory? Does it imply that, during His earthly life, His Divine power was only obscured because of earthly conditions, or that He refrained from making use of it, giving up for the time some or all of the attributes of Deity? Was it merely a veiling or a temporary renunciation of His Divine Power? or was it a complete self-emptying, leaving only the consciousness of a former state, in which the limitations of His earthly life did not exist, in which he exercised "the attributes of power and knowledge which for the time being He had laid aside"?

This is the modern form of a difficulty, inherent in the Church's faith from the beginning, and we have seen it emerge at every stage. But until within modern times it never came to be a living question. The Church asserted with unwavering firmness the two aspects of Christ's Person, and left the mystery of their union (as it still is) unsolved. It is true that an attempt was

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made by Cyril of Alexandria, who discusses the nature of the “self-emptying.” But the general position of the Church was that Christ, in becoming man, assumed what He was not, without ceasing to be what He was. His humiliation was as St Leo expressed it, a condescension of pity, not a loss of power. The self-emptying in earlier theological use is thus “little more than a synonym for the Incarnation, but it emphasised the Incarnation as a divine act, human nature being saved from above rather than by self-development from below.” And modern scholarship as represented by Dr Lightfoot finds, in St Paul’s use of the phrase, simply an illustration of this conviction that the form of God—meaning our Lord’s real divine nature—was unalienable, though the glories or prerogations of Godhead were necessarily limited by conditions pertaining to creaturely existence. Beyond this the general thought of the Church did not go, and it is questionable

whether it can go, except on lines of speculation which would be fatal to her essential faith.

On these lines of speculation, however, there have been abundant inquirers, and the search still continues for a theory of Christ's Person which, beginning from the purely human side, shall explain the secret of His influence, and the consistent surrender of His Church to the power of that influence in the sure faith of His Divinity.

It was inevitable indeed that, when the Church admitted limitations imposed by our Lord upon Himself during the Incarnate life, Christian thought should go on to seek for a definition of these limitations. Yet this inquiry only became acute when personal salvation came, as at the Reformation, to be the primary interest colouring all religious controversy. Men began again to think of Him as the Redeemer, and emphasis was laid on His life of obedience as well as His death on

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the Cross; He was seen to be the Perfect Revealer of God and the Perfect Exemplar as well as surety for man. With the instinct of a practical man rather than a theoretical thinker, Luther seized upon a central idea in the Apostolic teaching on Redemption and applied it to the Person of Christ. As there was a true union between Christ and the believer by which His merits were transferred to the sinner, and the sinner's guilt to Christ, so that as St Paul said, "not I but Christ"—Christ and the Soul are as one Person, so he thought there was between the two natures of the Saviour, and the properties of the one were transferred to the other. No doubt he had hold of a great truth in the deep affinity between God and Man, which is of the very essence of Christian doctrine. If we may be partakers of the divine nature, may not this be true supremely of the human nature of Christ? But even if it were, did not the facts of Christ's earthly life compel the

assumption that during His humiliation He had laid aside the very properties of His Divine nature, which had been imparted to His Humanity. Thus the self-emptying, in Luther's view, referred only to the manhood, and was no explanation of the mystery.

The immediate consequences of Luther's position were more grave than he had apparently grasped. For if the divine attributes were transferred to the human nature, it must be not only ubiquitous, but omnipotent and omniscient. I need not refer to the Controversy which followed, except to say that it sowed the seeds of a modern theory which in a variety of forms has gone far beyond Luther, reversing his position, and beginning from the human experience of Christ. It is probably a natural result from these two causes, the old Lutheran controversy, and the renewed study of the life.

This modern theory appears, as I have said, in a variety of forms, but all are characterised

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by the same principle. It is maintained that "the Son in becoming man did not simply submit Himself as man to human limitations, and did not merely abstain, as a rule, from the exercise of the Divine powers in His Humanity, but as God surrendered them altogether, so as no longer, even in the Divine sphere, to be omniscient or omnipotent, and that this was possible because God, as God, can divest Himself of what is not essential to Him, and nothing is essential to Him but His moral will 'making for' Goodness."

In short, this bold modern theory makes a desperate plunge into the depths of the mystery of Christ's Divine Human Person, and in order to avoid one obvious difficulty raises a host of others. He declares that, in one form, the Son of God ceased to be *what* He was, though remaining *who* He was. How is this compatible with the unchangeableness of God? He declares in another, that

the Divine word gave up certain attributes of Divinity. How can He then be divine? Can you omit a part of His Divinity, and say that "He acted or lived minus that part." Again, it is said that He abandoned His pre-incarnate glory, and state of equality with God. Can He then remain in any true sense divine?

Indeed, it would almost seem as if every form of this attempt to explain the Incarnation simply transferred the mystery from one point to another. It is no real explanation of the unity of the Person of Christ. It perverts the truth of His manhood, and leaves His Divinity in the air. It absorbs into itself some of the heresies of the past, and tries a short cut of its own to explain the mystery. As Ritschl said, much of its speculation is pure mythology. No doubt the various forms of the theory "are commendable as attempts to do justice to the historical personality of Jesus, but are unsatisfactory, in

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putting an undue strain on the passages in the New Testament which are supposed to teach the doctrine, and in venturing on bold assertions about the constitution of deity which go far beyond the compass of our intelligence in these high matters." Certain it is that no form of this modern theory is without grave difficulty. Originating in a most honourable impulse of Christian thoughtfulness, it is the outcome not only of a sense of intellectual necessity but of Spiritual need. Yet it starts problems and mysteries which tower above the initial question, how to reconcile His human experience and His divine power. It is difficult, if not impossible, to show its agreement with Scripture. It contradicts the unchangeableness of God. If the Son was self-abandoned on earth, must He not remain so in heaven? It is a fallacy to isolate those three-and-thirty years of His earthly life: at least, it is incompatible with the Church's faith in His divinity. Those

years are but as a zone of that unending light in which, as God and man, the One Christ for ever dwells.

Indeed, the moral weight of the self-emptying of Christ has been largely lost under the complexity of the difficulties raised. When St Paul uses the expression, he is making an appeal to the conscience, and were the problem approached from this side, we might have greater hope of light. For certainly, though the thought of Christ's "self-emptying" agitates the mind with a thousand questions, it fills the soul with a great peace. Appearing as a problem to the intellect, it remains as a moral inspiration to the heart and life. For it brings home to us in the most vivid way the great fact that the centre of our faith, the ground of our hope, and the motive of our love is the Humiliation of the Eternal Son of God, who for us men and for our Salvation emptied Himself, and was made in the likeness of man, and regu-

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lated the exercise of His own divine power through His humanity, learning, knowing, suffering what, having come to identify Himself with man, He had to learn, and know, and suffer as man for men. There is, therefore, a real self-limitation, and beyond this is mystery of which it is probably true, that no theories devised by any human mind can make less than it is.

It seems likely then that in the long-run this modern theory will be met by the Church, as she has met other attempts, to solve the mystery, by eliminating some of its essential elements. Yet it has served great ends. It has enriched Christian thought by renewed concentration on the human experience of Christ, and it will doubtless contribute to that fuller expression of the truth, which may increasingly explain the secret of Christ's influence, and the consistent surrender of His Church to the power of that influence in the faith of His Divinity.

Notwithstanding, therefore, difficulties inherent and ever recurrent, the Church's faith in Christ grows as it goes forward, not merely by persisting in the battle for clearer dogmatic expression, but by gathering to itself the corroborative results of Christian experience, in which Christ is recognised as the quickening impulse in individual life, as well as in an advancing civilisation, touching human life with an ever-broadening power, and awaking new ideals in every department of our manifold activity.

While the theologian and the philosopher are engaged in the task, which lies on them like a spell, of setting in right relation to human thought the fact of Christ's transcendent Personality, the fact itself will continue to work moral wonders in the world of men, and if the speculative quest should still seem to fail, it will not be our faith but our philosophy that is at fault.



THE RECURRENT QUESTION AND  
THE UNCHANGING FAITH.

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## VI.

### THE RECURRENT QUESTION AND THE UNCHANGING FAITH.

“Who is this?” Such was the question which rang through the streets of Jerusalem when Jesus made what is known as His triumphal entry into the city. There was evidently a tumult of feeling surging through men’s hearts on that memorable day. Expectations more or less vague, fears more or less definite, stirred them to unwonted excitement. It became known that He was coming up from Bethany, and the excitement grew intense. There had been doubt as to His appearing, and the question had been eagerly canvassed: “What think ye, that He will not

come at all to the Feast?" For this excitement and commotion there were many reasons, but chief among them all was the raising of Lazarus. It was the theme of every group that gathered to the Passover, and we can well believe that the lines of our modern poet describe a true experience when he says—

" From every house the neighbours met,  
The streets were fill'd with joyous sound ;  
A solemn gladness even crowned  
The purple brows of Olivet—  
Behold a man raised up by Christ."

When, therefore, the rumour went abroad that Jesus was approaching, the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. It was even fanned by the hatred of the rulers, and their known determination to put Lazarus also to death. Accordingly a great crowd went out to meet Him. Jesus Himself had evidently resolved to make His entrance to the city the occasion of a visible and striking appeal to the reality of His Messianic claims. Taking

the familiar prophecy of Zechariah, which in the minds of the people was associated with the coming of the Messiah, He determined to enter the city in the manner there described. He had made all preparations by sending forward His disciples, and when the crowd from the city came to the turn of the road on the slope of Olivet they saw the figure of Jesus mounted as the prophet had described. The effect upon their minds was evidently electric. They could not fail to recall the words so often on Jewish lips: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee." Instinctively they proceeded to accord Him a fitting welcome, cutting branches from the palm trees by the roadside and waving them in triumph as they escorted Him to the city with acclamations of Joy: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

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When at last the crowd swept down from the Mount of Olives and passed through the gate, the whole city was moved, as St Matthew tells us in expressive language, for the word really means that a wave of emotion had thrilled through Jerusalem like the shaking of an earthquake, and the cry arose—Who is this? Who is this?

I do not propose, however, to follow that questioning multitude, or even Jesus Himself through the stirring events of that day, whose loud Hosanna was so soon to be changed into the bitter cry of “Crucify Him.” It is rather to the question itself that I wish to direct your attention. For since that eventful day it has stirred many souls, it has been heard above the surging tide of hostile or of friendly emotion, and still through all the conflict of thought and opinion it is the one supreme and all-comprehensive inquiry for the world at large and for the individual soul.

## I.

The question is indeed typical, and has been characteristic of returning phases of religious inquiry from the beginning until now. But it is by no means accidental, that it takes the central place in every crisis of Christian history, for it occupies that place by an indefeasible right, a right conferred by Christ Himself. The occasion is specially memorable even in His memorable life. He had come with His disciples to the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, a town just beyond the frontier of Galilee, where Judaism and heathenism met. He was apparently absorbed in deep meditation, moved, as has been suggested, by the thought of the spiritual needs alike of Jew and Gentile which He alone could meet. It was then and there that He broke silence with a momentous question, of which it has been truly said that through all

the centuries since gone by it has riveted the eye of thinking and adoring Christendom—“Whom say ye that I am?” From the importance which ~~He~~<sup>Jesus</sup> attached to this question it is evident that He regarded it as vital. For upon the answer to it would depend the future of His Church and the influence of His Religion. It is clear then that the instinct which prompts the abiding question, “Who is this?” coincides with Christ’s own standpoint. It brings us face to face with Him, and compels us to see in Himself the very core and centre of His Religion.

## II.

There are three ways of dealing with this question: We may try to avoid it; we may seek to evade it; or we may frankly face it.

(1) It may be said, as indeed it has often been said, that such a question is beside the mark, that the real interest of Jesus Christ

is His teaching and example, and that it is of no vital importance to discuss His Personality. This was the common attitude of the older Unitarian School. Emerson, as we saw, spoke of historical Christianity as dwelling with noxious exaggeration on the Person of Jesus. Even so spiritual a teacher as Channing, though he believed Christ to be more than an ordinary human being, said we had no interest in His position in the scale of Existence. Yet if there was exaggeration on the one side there was depreciation on the other. And all along the centuries the question has continually emerged—"Who is this?" No attempt to put it aside has ever permanently succeeded.

A very plausible argument may easily be presented. We may be told that religion has nothing to do with metaphysics, and that to know the precise rank which Christ occupies in the universe cannot be essential to the welfare of humanity, or the Salvation of an

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individual soul. Nor need we pause to dispute such statements, except to remark that they are very generally accompanied by a quite definite assertion of Christ's rank in the order of being. It is characteristic of all such disclaimers to assume or even to assert that His rank is simply on the plane of humanity. The argument is therefore hardly ingenuous, for it gives reasons against a decision, having already pronounced a Verdict.

It is vain to suppose that men will be persuaded to cease from showing interest in the Person of Christ by a blunt refusal to entertain the question. For the question has persistently declined to be put aside. At the end of every period of controversy it emerges fresh and definite as ever. Behind every phase of conflicting opinion we hear it again repeated, and the reason is obvious. For whether it be that Christ is set forth as Example or Teacher or Saviour, whether it be that our assent is demanded for His Revelation

of God, for His offer of Redemption, or for the assurance of Immortality, the question is morally pertinent and inevitable—"Who is this?" It is unreasonable as it is certainly unhistorical to say that such a question is beside the mark. We cannot avoid it.

(2) Can we then by some subtler process evade it? Without exactly avoiding the question, can we shun a direct issue? It is maintained that we can,—that we may leave the question as to Christ's Person and be content, estimating His religious "value" for us and for the world. I am putting it concisely, but this is substantially the keynote of one of the most influential movements of religious thought within our time; and it is associated with many scholarly names. The main reason for adopting this evasion—I use the word without imputation of motive—is the same as that given for setting the question absolutely aside, the desire to be free of metaphysics. It is pointed out—and with

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truth — that our main interest is religious. We are more concerned in the salvation of our souls than in the solution of intellectual problems. Therefore, it is argued, we should rest content with Christ as known in His earthly history, and Christ as known in experience, leaving the Christ of metaphysics in the limbo of dead controversies.

Now, there is wisdom as well as truth in the warning of the school of opinion which calls emphatic attention to the religious "value" of the Personality of Christ as our first concern. We must not forget that "the primary message of the Gospel is comfort and forgiveness, a sense of Sonship and acceptance, and in no case the resolution of all the problems of thought and existence." It is certain we cannot be saved merely by correct intellectual propositions. It is certain we cannot thus satisfy the religious instincts. We are more likely to lose God than to find Him, if we try to feed the soul on intellectual

abstractions, forgetting the ethical and spiritual kernel of truth which alone can satisfy. It is through the sense of moral and spiritual need that we see God in Jesus Christ; it is because we are sinners that we see in Him a Saviour. It is the barest truth to say that "God as a Saviour is a reality, for which more experimental evidence can be brought than for the absolute of philosophy."

Yet the warning of this school of opinion is only valid so far, and beats in vain against the instincts of the human heart and the steadfast resistance of the human mind. The cry against dogma only results in other dogma; the complaint against irrational theologising gives ground for stronger complaint. The old theology is hustled by the new, yet we are deeper in metaphysics than ever, more than ever entangled in contradictions. Truth to say, we can no more stay the effort to give full intellectual expression of our religious conceptions than we can stay the in-

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coming of the tide. As a leader of modern thought has said, "the individual consciously or unconsciously will formulate the Christian experience, and, left to himself, will formulate it inadequately. Released from the dogma of the Church, he will react upon and limit the experience." There is thus no escape from the urgency of the demand involved in the question, "Who is this?" We can neither avoid nor evade it. We must press onward and inward to the core of Christian experience. The question still remains. We must frankly face it.

(3) Now, it would seem plain that the Christian Church as a whole has proceeded for a long period on a very definite and positive answer to the question. If there be anything in Christianity that we can call Catholic, in the true sense of that much-abused word, it is the faith of the Church in Christ as the Son of the Living God. And

yet, as from the beginning, so in our day, this faith is always being threatened.

Opposed to the answer of the Church, a variety of attempts have been made, but the only logical alternative is the humanitarian answer, which appears to have the advantage of simplicity. It is so much easier to stop short. We seem to leave no tag-ends for thought when we simply accept Christ as a man of unique goodness and unique personal influence. And yet all is not so clear cut as would appear. Great gaps are left in our thinking, and we are driven to place Him so high that ordinary human tests will not suffice. It is historically certain that those who came under His immediate personal influence could not think of Him as merely man like ourselves. It is certain also that modern scholarship, even when it declines to take the final step of recognising His claims, finds in Him what cannot be judged by

ordinary standards. It comes as near as possible to the essential faith of the Church, but stops short, leaving a difficulty greater than any encountered by the faith itself. For when we say that "in Jesus the divine appeared in as pure a form as it can appear on earth," have we not reached a point when we must think of Him as neither truly human nor yet truly divine,—a kind of demi-god, which neither history nor philosophy can finally accept, a Christ of whom it has been said, by one who was himself a leader in philosophic thought, that no philosopher who had outgrown the demonism of ancient systems could for a moment acquiesce. While, therefore, the humanitarian answer seems to attract by its apparent simplicity, it often ends in greater confusion of thought.

### III.

From that confusion there is no way of escape, except in the essential faith of the

Church. The historic statement of that faith does certainly involve great difficulties, but it is at least sufficient for its main purpose. It omits no side of the problem, and it amply accounts for the uniqueness of Christ's character and influence. It frankly faces a clean-cut issue. It cannot describe Christ as mere man: it cannot describe Him as an intermediate divinity. It can only say with St John, "The Word was God." It is the only answer, not because it is free from difficulty, but because, as it has been truly said, it is inevitable.

Indeed, it has been very evident that the full expression of the faith has never been free from intellectual difficulties. But the faith is not a possession of the intellect merely, it is also a moral venture justified by experience, it is an attitude of soul. And the day will never come when it will cease to be necessary earnestly to contend for its right expression,

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even while, secure in its possession, the Church lives by its power.

When, therefore, new forms of attack or new modes of evasion appear at the present time, when the problem presented by the faith is simply shunted by obliterating the distinction between God and man, when the Godhead of Christ is described as His perfect Humanity, and His perfect Humanity as His true Divinity, when it is roundly declared that Jesus was God and so are we, we know that we are back among the ghosts of exploded heresies, and the comment of a passing critic is certainly sound: "Christian people will not readily believe that there is no difference between the divine nature and their own, or that they are all potential Christs. Nor, we suspect, will they soon part with the conviction that they owe to Jesus Christ what no man could ever give, on which account alone they would no doubt say, they render Him with all the ages a place and a homage apart."

It is this instinct which has always inspired the historic theology of the Church. Every age has brought its difficulties and deepened its sense of insufficiency for the high demands of faith. But every age has seen it turn with renewed intensity to the source of its first conviction. It has always gone deeper and deeper into the fountain from which the impulse sprang to hold the faith of Christ, "as man embraced as God adored." And thus it has withstood the successive shocks of negative attack, ever emerging enriched, by its fresh experience, and gathering a wider harvest of spiritual truth in its renewed affirmation of this central confession—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Some general considerations may be offered which justify the Church in holding this with serene confidence even amid intellectual perplexity.

(1) As the faith was won at the beginning, so must it ever be, under the direct moral

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and spiritual influence of Christ. It is natural for us, who have grown up under Christian influences absorbing the faith almost insensibly, to accept it as a matter of course. Perhaps we have even imagined that it was given to the first believers in a manner which admitted of no hesitation. We have cherished the fancy that had we been with them in the streets and lanes of Galilee all doubt would have vanished, we would have recognised the unmistakable stamp of divinity, and would have bowed before Him as the Eternal Son of God. We forget that many who came into personal contact with Him had no such experience, and it is quite possible that we also might have failed to see in Jesus the Christ of God.

The truth is, that the faith of the Church in Christ began, as it was also maintained, from the moral and spiritual side. For it was the whole impression which Christ produced, along with His express claim, that created in men's

minds the conviction of His Divinity. That impression is one of the unassailable facts of history, and it is the just claim of the Church that, if we go to the accepted facts with the faith as thus held, the facts will fall more readily into rational unity than under any conceivable view of Christ's Person.

But the rational unity depends ultimately on the moral impression, which we may ourselves experience, even through the scanty record left to us. Putting aside for the moment the thought of Christ's living presence through the Holy Ghost to take of the things that are Christ's and show them unto us, we can understand the impression produced by His Personality. We see Him "acting on human hearts with winsome gentleness, with a soul-moving sorrow for sin, and with a great enabling power." We can realise how His presence touched men's hearts and probed their consciences, how it quickened them to new power, how it en-

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abled them to resist sin, how it moved them to righteousness, how it made God real to them, how it inspired them with the conviction, and drew from them the confession, that God was in Christ. Those very elements in Christ's character and teaching, which stand out in such moral magnificence at the distance of nineteen centuries, had borne in with the freshness of their heavenly origin upon the hearts of the first disciples. All through His ministry He was testing and training them. One by one the illusions dropped from their minds. The whole effect of His Presence had affected them with an ever deepening and awe-inspiring influence; and at last, so deep had they drunk of their Master's grace, so much had they perceived of their Master's glory, that they could not doubt,—they acknowledged Him as Lord and God. Thus was the faith won. Here is the core of the historic confession, and Jesus sealed it with His word: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh

and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

Thus the Christ of history became the Christ of experience, and faith in Christ was the inevitable result of a moral impression as well as of a logical argument.

(2) Again, as the faith was won, so also has it been maintained. Christ Himself is always with us, and always He is compelling the same confession. Yet no faith can be maintained which does not commend itself to the reason, and does not ring true to the intellect. Hence, as we have seen, it has been the work of earnest Christian thought to unfold the meaning of this great experience, which lies behind the New Testament, and is the source of the Church's life. This is the explanation, as it has been the motive, of the long history of Christian doctrine. It is the constant and continuous effort to answer more and more clearly the question, "Who is this?" It begins in the

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New Testament, and it is going on to-day. Yet the essential truth is the same, and lives spiritually in the hearts of true believers as it did at the beginning. With a throb distinct and unmistakable it beats through Christian history. It stirs in living power through the New Testament records. It irradiates the names by which Christ is called as Son of man and Son of God, as Master and Lord, and finally as "the word" of God. It finds in this last expression its weapon of defence against the inroads of doubt, and its link of connection with all truth in every sphere. It brings this world-transforming truth of Christ as the Eternal Word out from the New Testament into the wide field of human thought. There it confronts the Greek as it has already confronted the Jew, with the offer of a new life in Christ, compelling the adoration of the believing intellect, and struggling for reasoned expression, till at last in the historic creeds it is declared with

that note of triumphant certainty which still survives.

Yet at the back of all this intellectual struggle is the indestructible impulse rising in the heart of every man who seriously faces the reality of Christ, the consciousness of His ineffable holiness: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” It was through the conviction of sin that men looked for a Saviour. It was through the experience of redemption that they came to know the Redeemer. The truth of Christ’s Divinity comes home to the soul even as it did to the first disciples. “The man who now so knows Christ that Christ has taken away from him all his sin—he has truly recognised Christ as the Son of God.”

As the faith was won through personal submission, so has it been maintained and preserved by a long and constant discipline.

(3) Now it is surely right that we should remember these things, when again in our

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day the faith of the Church is called to fresh contention and discipline. The faith is a spiritual treasure. It is a moral possession, not merely an intellectual proposition. It rests upon an experience produced by the knowledge of Christ, and it cannot commend itself to reason apart from that experience. Hence we may expect, as in the past, so also in the future, hesitation and denial. Time and again it has seemed to be overwhelmed; time and again it has risen triumphant, purified of false accretions, relieved of sophistries, not a dead formula but a living faith.

Is it not, then, the merest cowardice of an enfeebled and uninformed imagination to suppose that this faith which has weathered so many storms is doomed at last? Have we not seen it emerging from its original source in the life, character, and teaching of Jesus, and seeking for ever clearer and fuller expression? Have we not seen it struggling

with the Judaism of its earlier time, and bearing away a clear conviction of Christ's supernatural rank; then with the heathen intellectualism of the first centuries, and bearing away the master thought which still holds the citadel, of Christ as perfect God and perfect man; then with the new problems of the Reformation age, and bearing away a truer appreciation of the place of His Humanity, as well as His Divinity in the work of Redemption? Even within our own age we have seen it battling with new problems, and adjusting itself to newly-discovered truth. The sciences of Astronomy, Geology, Physiology, Historical Criticism, filled many with alarm. But we have survived these alarms. We have not ceased to believe in Christ because God's Universe is greater than we thought, because we know more of how the foundations of the earth were laid, or because criticism has shown that the revelation of God has indeed been gradual,

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"at sundry times and in divers manners." The faith has survived the difficulties of the past, and before those that still beset us it has no reason to quail. Under what category the full truth may ultimately be expressed who shall say? Yet the lessons of history when rightly used are full of encouragement, and he is no blind optimist who affirms that "the triumphant Jesus crowned with many crowns is even now, and in the terms of our strongest and richest thinking, revealing Himself to the consciousness of a faith that blends learning with reverence."

Thus, still deeply conscious of the mystery, and welcoming all truth which shall set forth its faith in balanced harmony, the Church can still ask with unfailing confidence, "Who is this?" For it admits no inconsistency in setting Christ so high, inasmuch as it knows nothing higher. It sees no reason to give up its conviction, forced by the facts, that Christ is as Divine as the

Father, and as Human as ourselves. This is the essential truth. For more than this the faith does not contend, with less than this it cannot be satisfied.

#### IV.

Meanwhile it is not necessary that men should wait till the last word has been spoken. Each age has its own vision of Christ, and for every man the word of promise stands, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by."

In spite, therefore, of the chill air of uncertainty which seems to have settled down on some thoughtful people, as if after the long record of the Church's Faith no man could really tell what Christianity is, or whether its claims have real validity, we may rightly claim the testimony of history as continuous confirmation of the essential faith of the Church. The devout believer of to-day centring his faith in Christ is at

home in the New Testament, and breathes its spiritual atmosphere with comfort to his soul. While he waits in confidence for a fuller co-ordination of all the elements of truth, our faith still stands secure, that in coming to Christ we come to God, in knowing Christ we know God, in obeying Christ we obey God.

Of all attempts to undermine that sure conviction we say, as Athanasius said of Julian the Apostate, *Nebicula est transibit*. It is a little cloud, it will pass away. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

It may seem that we have wandered far from that scene in Jerusalem from which we started. But there are links that bind that surging multitude with all the tumult of spiritual conflict from age to age. Those who are familiar with Mr Hole's fine series of

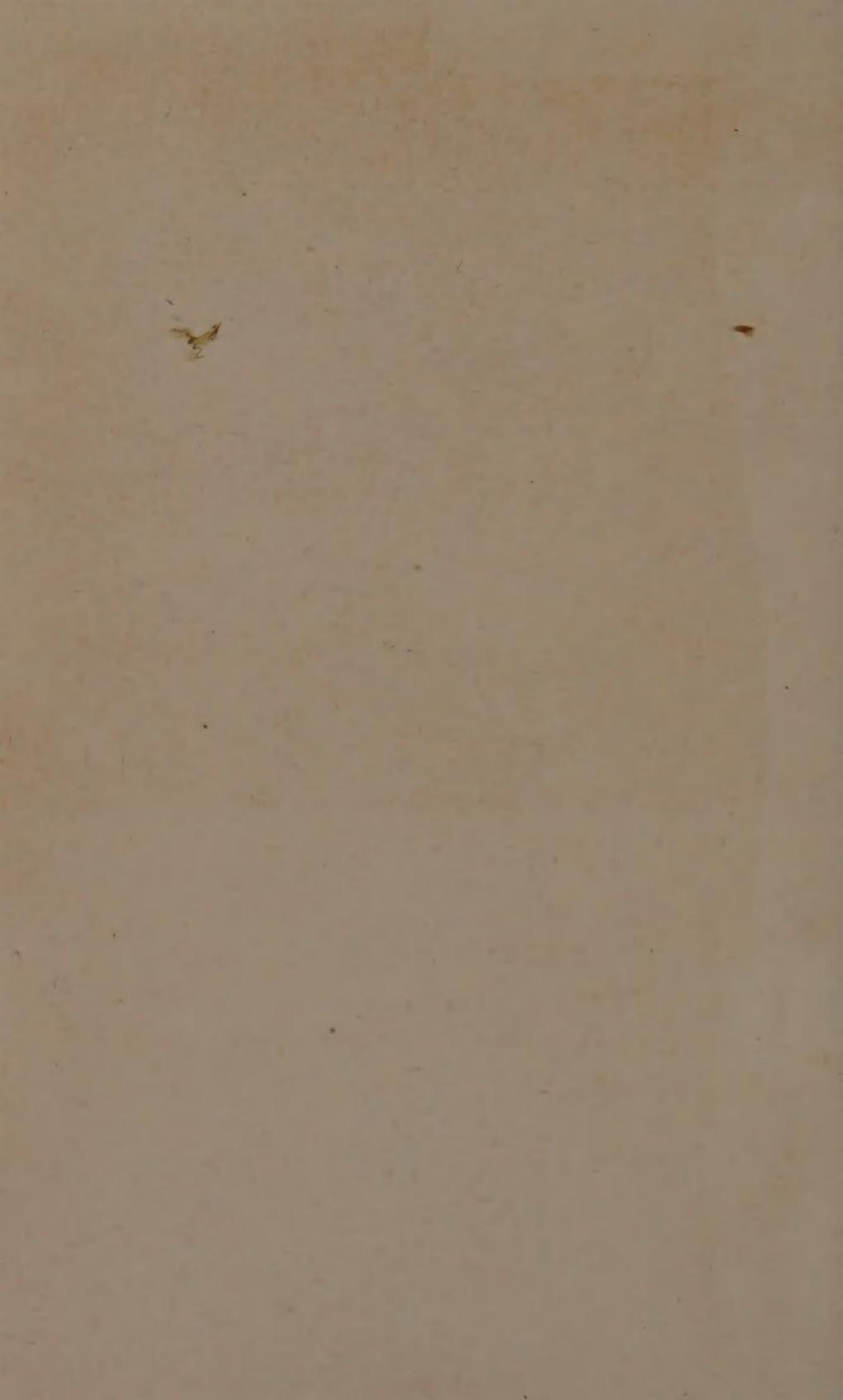
illustrations of the life of Jesus, will remember how he has depicted the incident of the triumphal entry. As the procession moves through the streets, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, is being carried by with the significant emblems of earthly power. So it may have been that day, so in truth it ever is. Still, as of old, we see the Christ moving through the press of humanity, we see the symbols of worldly grandeur carried by. We hear the sound of many voices—some in scorn and anger, some in yearning anxiety, all in eager intensity. On every side is the old cry, “Who is this?” But above the din and confusion comes that solemn chant which through all variations of Christian experience still thrills the heart of believing Christendom with the essential truth of an unchanging faith: “Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.”

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The person of Christ in the faith of the  
church. Edinburgh, W. Blackwood, 1920.  
207p. 20cm. (Croall lectures, 15th se

1. Jesus Christ--Person and offices--Ad  
essays, lectures. I. Title. II. Series:  
Croall lectures, 1919?

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